



## THE WYNDHAM GIRLS.

BY MARTIN AMES TABBART.

*The following story is the third of the long stories complete in one number that are to appear in the present volume of ST. NICHOLAS.*

*Given especially well before the arrival of these three young women who, suddenly brought to face a trying situation, show themselves brave, cheerful, and capable despite lack of preparation; his boy-readers, too, will be sure to rate the "Wyndham Girls" delightful friends. A touch of romance adds a pleasant flavor.*

### CHAPTER I.

"DON'T ITSEMPY-ITSEMPY."

"No pink for me, please; I want that shimmering green, made tip o'v'rt slittin'g white silk. It will make my glossy brown hair and eyes look like a ripe chestnut among its green leaves."

"Oh, Bab, such glist'ning sentences! 'Shimmering green,' 'shining white,' 'glossy hair'—you did n't mean glossy eyes, I hope! Besides, you know, chestnuts don't show among their green leaves; they stay in their hinds until they drop off the trees."

"Now Phyllis, what 's the use of spoiling a

practical metaphor, figure—what do you call it? Which do you like best? Have you made up your mind, Jessamy?"

"I want all white; probably this mousseline-de-soir."

The soft May wind from the distant river blew the lace curtains gently to and fro, lifting the squares of delicate fabrics scattered on the couch on which the three young girls were sitting. Jessamy, the elder of the two Wyndham sisters, was at eighteen very beautiful, with slinky elegance of motion, refinement of speech, almost statuesque grace, unusual to her age and generation. Barbara, a year younger, was her opposite. Life, energy, fun, were declared in

every turn of her head and hands. Small in figure, with sparkling dark eyes and a saucy tilt of nose and chin, she could hardly have contrasted more sharply with her tall, gray-eyed, delicately tinted sister, and with what Bab herself called "Jessamy's Undine ways." The third girl, Phyllis, was twin in age to Jessamy, unlike either of the others in appearance and temperament. She was their cousin, the one child of their father's only brother; but as she had been brought up with them since her fourth year, Jessamy and Barbara knew no lesser kinship to her than to each other. At first glance Phyllis was not pretty; to those who had known her for even a brief time she was beautiful. Sweetness, unselfishness, content shone out from her dark blue eyes with the large pupils and dark lashes. Her lips rested together with the suggestion of a smile in their corners, and the clear pallor of her complexion was shaded by her masses of dark brown hair, which warmed into red tints under the sunlight.

Across the room from her daughters and niece, enjoying the girls' happiness, sat Mrs. Wyndham, rocking slowly. She was a frail creature, sweet and gentle, still clad in the mourning she had worn for her husband for seven years; one felt that she had been properly placed in luxury, fortunately shielded from hardship. The Wyndhams were wealthy, and the beautiful morning-room in the house on Murray Hill was full of evidences of taste and the long possession of ample means to gratify it.

Even the samples fluttering under the girls' fingers bore the name of a French artist on Fifth Avenue, whose skill only the highly favored could command, and the consultation under way was for the selection for each young girl of gowns fit for a princess's wearing, yet intended for the use of maidens not yet "out," in the hops at the hotel at Bar Harbor in the coming summer.

"I 'm afraid I 'm dreadfully vain," sighed Jessamy, stroking the bits of soap-bubble-tinted gauzes as she laid them together on her knee. "I hope I love exquisite things for their own sake, not because I want them for myself; but I 'm not sure my love for them is purely artistic."

"You do want them for yourself, but it's just

as you want only good pictures in your room," said Phyllis, coming up flushed from the pursuit of some errant bits under the table. "You're born royal in taste. Bab and I could get on if we were beggared, but I can't imagine you shabby. Bab would revel in a sunbonnet and driving cows home, and I could be happy in a tenement, if we were together; but you're a princess, and you can't be anything else."

"You're a bad Phyl, whose object in life is to spoil every one by making them perfectly self-satisfied," said Jessamy. "I hope some of the excuses you find for me are true; I'm as luxurions by nature as a cat—I know that. Come to the window; I want to see this old-rose in the sunlight."

Bab stopped swinging her feet, and slipped from the arm of her mother's chair, where she had perched, to follow them. "Don't you abuse cats, nor my sister Jessamy, miss," she said, putting her arms around slender Jessamy and peering over her shoulder at the sample of silk, while she rubbed Jessamy's arm with her chin, like an affectionate dog. "They're two as nice things as I know. Madrina, Mr. Hurd is crossing the street, and he's headed this way."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Mrs. Wyndham, almost fretfully. "I suppose he is coming to urge me again to withdraw our money from the business; he has tormented me all winter to do it. He says it is n't secure; but that's absurd, with Mr. Abbott at the helm, whom your dear father trusted as he did himself! It's all because they won't show the books lately—as though I wanted to see them while Mr. Abbott is managing! I can't see why Mr. Hurd is so nervous and suspicious! Mr. Abbott came expressly to see me, and explained how bad it would be for the corporation if I offered my stock in the market. I understand him much better than Mr. Hurd; he is more patient, and won't leave a point until he has made me see it as he does. I am no business woman, and I can't understand these things very well at best. You stay in the room to-day, children, and see if you understand. Mr. Hurd insists that I am risking beggaring you, and that distresses me unspeakably."

"Don't mind Mr. Hurd, madrina; he's an Anxious Attorney," said Barbara, with an air of

lucidity, as Violet, the black maid, announced the lawyer, who followed at once on the announcement.

"We are pluming, or more properly donning, our feathers for flight, Mr. Hurd," said Mrs. Wyndham, rising, and pointing to the samples on the couch, as she extended her hand.

"Yes, yes!" said the little man, shaking hands with Mrs. Wyndham without looking at her. "Good morning, Miss Jessamy; good morning, Phyllis; how do you do, little Barbara? May I interrupt your — gracious powers, dear madam, I mean I *must* interrupt your plans, Mrs. Wyndham!"

Jessamy and Phyllis clutched each other with sudden pallor. The little lawyer's voice shook with emotion. Bab flushed, and ran to her mother, putting her arms around her frail figure as though to place herself as a bulwark between her and ill.

"You will not interrupt anything more important than the selection of dancing-gowns for the children," said Mrs. Wyndham, with her soft dignity, though she turned a little paler. "Is there any special reason for your visit, — kind visit always, — Mr. Hurd? And may the girls hear what you have to say, since their interests are at stake?"

"Special reason, madam? Special reason, indeed! Heaven help me, I don't know how to say what must be said, but I prefer the young ladies to hear it," groaned their old friend.

"Evidently you feel that you have something unpleasant to tell me, Mr. Hurd, but I feel sure you magnify it; you know you are always more timid and pessimistic than I," said Mrs. Wyndham, dropping into the nearest chair and trying to smile.

"Mrs. Wyndham, my dear lady, it is n't a matter for self-gratulation! If I could have made you listen to me six — even two months ago, I should not be here to-day, the bearer of this dreadful news," burst out the lawyer, impatiently.

"Would n't it be better to tell us quickly, Mr. Hurd? You frighten us with hints," said Jessamy, in her silvery, even voice, but the poor child's lips were white.

Mr. Hurd glanced at her. "Yes," he said, "but it is not easy. I heard the definite news

last night in Wall Street; rumors have been afloat for days. I wanted to give you one more night of untroubled sleep. It will be in the evening papers."

"What will, Mr. Hurd?" burst out Barbara, impatiently.

"The failure of the Wyndham Iron Company."

There was dead silence in the room, broken only by the low-toned French clock striking ten times.

"The company — failed?" whispered Mrs. Wyndham, trying to find her voice.

"What does that mean, Mr. Hurd?" asked Phyllis.

"It means that your mother's bonds and stocks are valueless, and as she holds everything in her own right, and has kept all that your father left in the business, it means that your inheritance has been wiped out of existence," said the lawyer, not discriminating between daughters and niece in his excitement.

"How can the company have failed? I don't believe it!" cried Mrs. Wyndham, starting to her feet with sudden strength.

"Dear Mrs. Wyndham, it is too certain," said her husband's old friend and attorney, gently. "When they refused to open up the books for inspection I knew this would come."

"Mr. Abbott —" began Mrs. Wyndham.

"Mr. Abbott is an outrageous villain," interrupted Mr. Hurd, passionately. "He has got control of the business, and ruined it by running it on a speculative basis — though justice to his business capacity compels me to add that he has secured himself against harm. Henry Wyndham was completely deceived in him."

"I never knew any one ruined outside of books," said Jessamy, trying to smile. "What does it mean? Going to live in an East Side tenement and working in a sweat-shop?"

"Nonsense, Jessamy!" said her mother, sharply, drying the tears which had been softly falling, while Bab wailed aloud at the picture. "Nonsense! I shall sell some stock, and I am sure we shall get on very well, perhaps economizing somewhat."

"Dear madam, you no more grasp the situation than you saw it coming," said Mr. Hurd, struggling between annoyance and pity. "The

value of your stock is wiped out; practically, you have no stock. Still, I hope matters will not be as bad as Miss Jessamy pictures. This house will rent or sell for enough to give you six or eight thousand a year, and if you sell the pictures and furniture you will have a very respectable principal to live upon; bad as the case is, it might be far worse."

"Do you mean that this house will be the sole—actually the sole—source of income?" gasped Mrs. Wyndham, with more agitation than she had yet shown.

Mr. Hurd nodded.

The poor lady uttered a sharp cry, and fell back, sobbing wildly. "Then I have nothing, nothing!" she screamed. "My darlings are beggared."

Phyllis rang for Violet, and Mr. Hurd leaped to his feet, apprehending the truth. "What do you mean, Mrs. Wyndham?" he demanded.

Mrs. Wyndham rested her head on Phyllis's arm. "Last March," she said feebly, "Mr. Abbott came to me, telling me that the business was temporarily embarrassed, and asked me to let him negotiate a loan with this house as security."

Mr. Hurd, who had been pacing the floor furiously, stopped short with a fervent imprecation. Halting before the feeble creature who had been so duped, he thrust his hands deep in his pockets and gazed down at her. "And you did it?" he growled.

Mrs. Wyndham bowed her head lower, and just then Violet came back with Jessamy, who had gone to seek her, and, with her black face gray from sympathy and fright, put her strong arms around her mistress's fragile body, lifting her like a baby.

"Come right along, you po' little lamb-lady," she said. "Miss Jes'my done telephone for de doctah, an' I 's goin' make you comf'able in bed. Don' you cry 'nothah teah; Vi'let ain't goin' let nothin' come neah you."

Utterly prostrated in mind and body, Mrs. Wyndham found comfort in the soft voice and loving arms. She drooped her head on the tall girl's pink gingham shoulder, and let herself be carried to her chamber as if she had been a child.

Jessamy turned to Mr. Hurd. "You will not mind if we received the news rather badly?"

she said. "We all shall play our parts when we have learned them. It—it—came rather suddenly, you see." Evidently Jessamy was going to be the princess her cousin called her, and meet misfortune proudly.

"You dear child!" said the lawyer, his eyes dimming as he looked in the lovely face, blanched white, and noted the lines holding the soft lips grimly set to keep them from quivering. "You and Phyllis are little heroines. Don't try to be too brave; it is better to cry, and then wipe away the tears to see what is to be done after the shipwreck."

"What are we likely to have to live on if we sell our things?" asked Jessamy, trying to thank him with a smile.

"No one can say positively; it is guesswork. But your father knew good pictures, and I should say you might have an income of two thousand a year out of the net result of the sale. We won't go into that this morning. Good-by, my dears. Try not to worry. No one knows what is best for him in this curious world. People are usually better and stronger for trying their mettle, as well as their muscle. God bless you!" Jessamy did not attempt to answer. Mr. Hurd laid his hand gently on each head, and went away.

Left to themselves, Jessamy and Phyllis looked at each other and around the pretty room still strewn with the samples of their dancing-gowns. With a sudden rush of memory they saw themselves little children playing around the kind father—father to both equally—who had given them this home, and with equal clearness saw the years stretching out before them in which this home would have no being. The necessity for self-restraint was removed; with a common impulse they threw themselves in each other's arms, and burst into passionate weeping.

Bab stirred uneasily on the floor where she had lain sobbing, dried her eyes, and said:

"Don't cry like that, girls; please don't. It does n't matter when I cry; I always go off one way or the other: but I can't stand you being wretched."

She gathered herself up and went over to the other two, who, having controlled themselves while she cried, could not raise their heads.

Bab was mercurial; she had wept her first horror away, and now the necessity of her nature to look on the bright side asserted itself.

"I think likely two thousand a year is a lot when you are used to it," she said. "I expect to learn to manage so well that we can adopt twins on the money left over from our expenses. I 'll get points from Ruth Wells; she has learned contriving. Look up; smile. 'Rise, Sally, rise; dry your weeping eyes!'"

"Don't, Bab; you have n't an idea of what has happened," said Jessamy, faintly, but at the same time she raised her head, checking her tears a little.

Bab saw it with secret triumph. "Don't I! I 've as much experience as you, miss, anyway. Still, I 'm willing to confess I 'd rather not be poor," she said, with the air of making a generous concession. "But we 'll be happy yet! It is rather hard to be thrown off your high wall, where you 've sat all your life. Poor Humpty-Dumpty! I never properly felt for him before!"

And Bab was rewarded for her nonsense by a tearful smile from Jessamy and Phyllis.

## CHAPTER II.

### FRIENDS, COUNSELORS, AND PLANS.

THE evening turned cool and damp, with the unreliability of May. Mrs. Wyndham, too ill to rise, slept, under sedatives, the sleep of utter exhaustion. The girls had taken refuge around the grate fire in Jessamy's beautiful room, with its fine pictures, and background of moss greens and browns. They were profoundly depressed, for on taking account of their stock of accomplishments they found that, though they were talented, they were untrained to practical labor, and that Jessamy's drawing, Bab's music, Phyllis's clever stories and verses, were all too amateurish to find a place in the marts.

"I suppose there is n't much good in making plans," said Jessamy, gazing gloomily into the fire. "I think we should live quite poorly for a while, within our income, whatever it is, and fit ourselves to do something well. I don't want to rush into any kind of half-good employment, when by self-denial, hardship perhaps, at first, we might amount to something in the end."

"Hail, Minerva!" cried Phyllis. "You 'll

be as thoroughbred a working-girl, if you must, as you were fine lady, and that 's what I love you for, Jasmine-blossom."

"My poor unfortunate children, are you sitting here in the dark?" cried a voice. "I saw that dreadful item in the 'Post'; is it true?"

"How do you do, Aunt Henrietta?" said Jessamy, rising, while Bab barely stifled a groan.

"About the failure? Yes, I 'm afraid it 's quite true."

Mrs. Hewlett was Mr. Wyndham's aunt: he had been her favorite nephew because he bore her name. Her grand-nieces did not love her. She had a strong tendency to speak her opinions, provided they were unpleasant to the hearer, for she prided herself on her sincerity and infallibility of judgment. Jessamy, Phyllis, and Bab recognized in her coming an added hardship at the end of their hard day.

"I always knew it would end this way," said Aunt Henrietta, dropping into an easy-chair and letting her cloak slip to the floor. "Your mother has no sort of business ability. Poor Henry!"

"Mama did not ruin the Iron Company, aunt, and papa can't need pity now as much as she does," said Bab, losing her temper instantly, as she always did on encountering her whom she disrespectfully called "the drum-major."

"How are you left?" demanded Aunt Henrietta, ignoring Bab, to Jessamy's profound gratitude.

"We shall have only what the contents of this house will bring," said Jessamy. "We hope it may be two thousand a year."

Aunt Henrietta held up both hands in genuine horror, crying: "Two thousand for such a family as you are! It is practically beggary. You have been brought up in the most extravagant way—never taught the value of money. Your mother spoiled you from the cradle. I suppose you will run through what little ready money you have, and then expect to be helped by your friends."

"Really, Aunt Henrietta, I can't see why you assume us entirely to lack common sense, principles, and pride," said Jessamy, struggling to keep her voice steady. "We were just resolving to make our income suffice, investing our little capital in some safe way."

"H'm! Two thousand suffice! You're exactly like your mother — absolutely impractical. If poor Henry —" began Mrs. Hewlett.

"Now, Aunt Henrietta, just drop mumbo, if you please," interrupted Barbara, hudy.

"She is the dearest mother in the world, and you know how papa loved her. I don't see what pleasure there can be in trying to blame some one for this trouble, but if any one is to blame it was dear papa himself, not mumbo, but he left her all his wealth, all his talent in Mr. Abbott, and never taught her one thing about business. Mama never said you did not understand things in all her gentle life, and I won't have her abused. In spite of all that you say, you were very proud of her lovely face and manners always, and glad enough to point her out as your niece. You've boasted of us while we were rich, and now you talk as if this trouble was a punishment for our sins, especially mama's. And I won't let you mention her! — dear, crushed mama! — bring us these heartbroken lot our sakes!"

Bab's cheeks had been getting redder, her voice higher, through this outburst, until at this point she burst into tempestuous tears.

"High-tighty, miss! Don't be imperi-

ous," said the old lady, after a pause. "You'll be dependent on your friends' charity in six months, and you will be wise not to offend them."

"I won't! I'll beg from door to door, or be a cash-girl first," Bab sobbed out.

"Besides, I'm not impatient; I'm only hurt."

"The idea of Bab's, on the verge of hysterics, made Jessamy and Phyllis smile faintly.

"Better not say any more, Bab," Phyllis whispered, as she stroked the hot cheek, while Jessamy said: "You must not mind Bab, aunt. We all are more or less overwrought. But I agree with her that, if you please, we will leave our mother out of the discussion."

"I don't mind that very flighty child; she never had a particle of stability, and

she has had no training," said Aunt Henrietta, with what in a less dignified person would have been a sniff. "What work will you take up? For of course it is ridiculous to talk of living on two thousand a year; you must go to work."

"We have not decided anything yet, aunt; we've had only a few hours to get used to being poor," replied Phyllis.

"I've been considering your case as I drove over, and I believe there's nothing you can do



AUNT HENRIETTA

decently. Your education is the thistle-down veneer girls get nowadays," said their aunt, disregarding the fact that she would have been no better armed to meet misfortune at their age.

"Veneer!" echoed Jessamy. "I hope not, though I don't know what thistle-down veneer is. I would n't mind being honest white pine, but I should despise the best veneer."

"I am sure you are only fit for nursery governesses. I have a place which Phyllis can take, to teach French to some girls of her own age. The mother applied to me for a teacher. They are new-rich, but that is the one thing Phyllis can do. I shall not be able to help you further," said Aunt Henrietta.

"We shall not need help," said Jessamy, her head up like a young racer. "Will you excuse us from more of this sort of talk, aunt? We have had a hard day."

Mrs. Hewlett rose; her eldest niece overawed her in spite of her determination not to mind what she called "Jessamy's affected airs."

"I felt sure I should not find you chastened by misfortune," she said. "You should take your downfall in a more Christian spirit. I trust you will heed me in one point at least. Sell your best clothes and ornaments. It will be most unbecoming if, in your altered circumstances, you dress as you did when you were Henry Wyndham's daughters. People will make the most unkind comments if you do."

Barbara had recovered by this time. "Are n't we still Henry Wyndham's daughters, aunt?" she asked guilelessly. "I did n't realize parentage as well as inheritance was vested in the business. What a calamity it failed! As to unkind remarks, no mere acquaintance will make them; all but our relatives will understand that we could afford fine things when we had them, and that failure did not destroy them."

"Bab, how can you?" said Jessamy, reproachfully, as Mrs. Hewlett disappeared. "There is no use in making her worse than she is."

"I could n't, Lady Jessamy; nature is perfect in her works," said Bab, airily, holding out her hand for a letter Violet offered her.

It was a note from a lifelong friend of her mother's, so loving, so considerate, so gener-

ously delicate in its offer of help that no better antidote to their great-aunt's trying peculiarities could have come to the poor girls, whose wounds were smarting as if salt had been dropped on them from Mrs. Hewlett's remarks.

"Dear, lovely, blessed Mrs. Van Alyn!" cried all three girls, sobbing on one another's shoulders after they had read the warm message; but this time their tears were of the sort which do good, and sent them to bed refreshed and comforted.

In the morning Bab started off early to carry out her plan of consulting Ruth Wells. Ruth was a brisk little creature of Bab's own age, who had been the Wyndhams' schoolmate for a short time, but who, meeting with misfortune also, had dropped almost entirely out of their lives; only Bab, refusing to let her go, kept up a much interrupted friendship with her.

Ruth lived with her mother in a little flat — apartment is too dignified a word — not far from the Morningside Heights. She was skilful with her needle, and earned by embroidering enough to supplement sufficiently for their needs an income hardly large enough to pay their low rent. Bab had always wondered that she was so happy. To-day she resolved, if possible, to solve the secret of her content.

As she pressed the button under the speaking-tube over which the name "Wells" shone on a narrow strip of brass, the latch of the front door clicked, and pushing it open, Barbara mounted the three flights of stairs.

Ruth herself opened the door at their head, and uttered an exclamation of surprise and pleasure at the sight of Bab.

"Oh, Babbie dear, does it affect you?" she cried at once. "I saw an account of the Wyndham Iron Works' failure in this morning's 'Times.'"

"It affects us so much, Ruth, that I came here to get your advice. You've had experience in coming down in the world. And I want to say," Bab went on, with heightened color, "that I wish we all had been here oftener. We never realized how lonely you must have been at first." And Bab looked around the little parlor with new interest.

"Oh, I was so much younger than we are now when our troubles came that they were

easier to bear," said Ruth, brightly. "You've always been a good friend, Bab. People who are poor are too busy to see much of those who have all their time on their hands. It is n't possible to be intimate with people who live very differently from ourselves. But do tell me, is it as bad a failure as the paper had it?" While Ruth had talked she had gotten off Bab's outer garments, and now seated herself at her embroidery-frame, while Bab drew a chair in front of it, and shook her head.

"Quite as bad; worse, in fact," she said, and proceeded to tell Ruth the whole story. "Now, what I want to know is whether four persons can possibly live on two thousand a year—supposing we have that—until we learn to be useful?" she asked in conclusion.

"Of course," said Ruth, with cheerful decision. She did not seem to think the case very bad. Taking a pencil and paper from the table, she began to reckon.

"Do you think you could do your own work in a little flat?" she asked.

"Mercy, no!" cried Bab, in horror. "Why, we'd starve! We can't do anything. We must board."

"That's a pity, for cheap boarding is unwholesome, vulgar, and generally horrid," said Ruth. "However, if you must, you must. It won't last. Mama and I began that way, but we soon learned better. You can get two rooms, maybe, for seven dollars apiece—twenty-eight dollars a week. That's—fifty-two times—fourteen hundred and fifty-six dollars a year. That leaves five hundred for washing, clothing, possible doctor's bill, and so on."

"Can we live for that?" asked Bab, awed by Ruth's businesslike methods.

"It will be bad, but you would be foolish to spend more. Your mother is delicate, and you will have to get her dainties, no matter how you board. We ran too close to our margin once. I never forgot the lesson," said Ruth.

"You've helped me a lot, Ruth," said Bab, rising to go. "I should n't mind being poor if I could be like you."

"Well, I believe I've a talent for poverty. It has a good side," laughed Ruth. "I'm happy because I'm so busy I've no time to imagine troubles. I can't even stop to realize I don't

feel well; so if that happens I hardly know it. I just work ahead and drive the headache off. You don't know how good it is for girls to have lots that must be done. Come see our flat," added brave Ruth, leading the way. "This is mama's room; the next one is mine. Here's the bath-room; you see, it is large, for a flat! And is n't this a nice little sunny dining-room? Here's the kitchen. Mama, this is Barbara Wyndham."

Mrs. Wells was bending over a double boiler on the gas-range. She looked sweet and well bred in her black gown, with a white apron shielding it, and held out a delicate hand to Bab, with no apology for her employment.

Bab looked at the rooms with newly perceptive eyes. Everything was of the plainest, yet so refined and dainty it could but be pretty. She began to suspect there were many things in life to learn which would prove pleasant knowledge. But she wondered, coming from the spacious Murray Hill rooms, how Ruth and her mother managed to move about in these without seriously damaging their anatomy. Ruth was so proud of it all, however, so unconscious of defects in her home, that Bab could envy her, though it was a meager box of a place, and Ruth worked hard to maintain it.

"Thank you again, Ruth," she said, as her friend hugged her at the head of the stairs, letting the pity she dared not express show in the warmth of her embrace and the tears in her eyes as she kissed her. "I'm coming often, please, for advice and courage. You've shown me already I need not fear. I suspect our first additional revenue will come from the sale of my great work, 'How to be Happy though Beggared.'"

### CHAPTER III.

#### WAYS AND MEANS.

EVENTS moved swiftly for the Wyndhams, impelled by the force of necessity. Mr. Wyndham had been widely known for the value of his art treasures, and collectors came from distant cities to bid for them as they hung on the walls. Everything else was to be sold by auction, and Mrs. Van Alyn, the kind friend whose loving letter had comforted the girls.



persuaded Mrs. Wyndham to come to her for the last two weeks of her nominal ownership of the house. It would be less painful for the poor lady to pass its threshold for the last time, shutting the door on everything as she had loved it, than to remain through the dismal dis-

mauling  
pro-  
cess.



"A TOUNG MAN DANKLED DOWN THE STEPS EPTO THE WIDEN."

Accordingly, one warm sunny morning Mrs. Van Allyn's tottered horses drew up at the door, and Mrs. Wyndham, looking very frail, and newly widowed under her long veil, came

slowly down the stairs, leaning on Jessamy's arm, and forth upon the doot-steps, where for the last time the mahogany door swung close, shutting out the mistress of the house forever. Mrs. Van Allyn helped the three girls through the dreadful days of the sale, at the end of which they found themselves homeless, but with their expectation of the result of the sale realized. They had, with a little personal legacy left them by a sister of Mrs. Hewlett, thirty thousand dollars reversion of their former wealth, which, invested by Mr. Hurd, would yield them an income of two thousand a year.

The first step to be made by these novices in the ungentle art of living was to find a boarding-place, and in this they were aided by Ruth, whose experience had taught what to seek and what to avoid. The limitations of their purse defined the boundaries of their search; only places where low prices obtained were open to the Wyndhams, a fact difficult to master at first, and the poor little pigsties up Poverty Hill shrank

from the mere exterior of some of the houses in their list of advertisements cut from the papers. They climbed long flights of stairs, to see repeated dingy rooms carpeted in flowery tapestry, carpets with oak or expressionless mahogany, black-walnut furniture—those finished in mahogany or maple were beyond the Wyndhams' range of price. These days of search taught the

girls more of life than their entire years had yet shown them, and the fruit of the tree of knowledge was bitter indeed.

"I tell you, you would be far better off in

your own little flat, cooking your own little dinner, on your own little gas-range, in your own little spider. However, don't lose heart; there are degrees of badness," laughed Ruth, as they despondently quitted an uncommonly discouraging specimen of the typical boarding-house, impregnated with odors of the dinners of "Christmases past."

At last they found a place, in one of the "Thirty" streets, where there were two rooms adjoining, though not connected, on the very topmost floor, which they could get at their price in consideration of the fact that they were heated only by stoves, and they would be expected to look after their own fires. They were sunny, and, though plainly furnished, less ugly than others the girls had seen, and they took them, since they could do no better, proceeding to make the best of what each felt in her heart was a very bad bargain, with the courage each possessed in different forms.

There were two days intervening between engaging and taking possession of the new hoarding-place, and Bab assumed the task of beautifying their unattractive quarters before her mother should see them. She would not permit any of the others to look at her improvements, but hammered her thumbs and strained her unaccustomed arms putting up curtains, shelves, casts, and photographs alone, in order, she said, "to usher her family into a bower of bliss" when it moved in.

On the afternoon before this event Barbara came down Thirty—Street from Sixth Avenue. Her arms were full of flower-pots,—two filled them,—and a boy followed with a basket containing six more. Bab had not been able to resist the temptation to invest in plants for her mother's window to make the room a little more cheerful.

She hurried down the street, and paused at the front of the steps long enough to let her listless squire catch up with her. She had no hand for her skirt, but she sprang up the steps, regardless of tripping; and at that instant the door opened, and a cocker-spaniel rushed out, barking wildly, and throwing himself downward with that utter disregard of whether head or tail went first, and of anything which might be in his path, characteristic of a young and blissful little dog.

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He flung himself down. Barbara stepped aside; her balance was uncertain and her skirts unmanageable by reason of her laden arms; she tripped—fell. Flower-pots, dog, and girl rolled crashing, and scattering dirt in all directions, into the boy and basket two steps lower, ending in a tangle on the sidewalk.

From the doorway a horrified voice cried: "Good heavens, 'Nixie'!" and a young man dashed down the steps into the ruins.

"Are you hurt?" he cried anxiously, as he fished Barbara out of the wreck. Nixie had already slunk out from under, and was wagging his tail deprecatingly, with glances at his master of mingled shame and amazement.

"I think I am," said Barbara, raising her head and trying to state the fact cheerfully.

The young man replaced her hat,—it had fallen over her eyes,—and revealed a woe-begone little face. Earth plastered the saucy chin; one cheek was cut; blood trickled from the bridge of the poor little tilted nose, making a paste wherever the loam from the flower-pots had spattered, and this was nearly everywhere. Barbara's hair was coming down, her hat was shapeless, and her eyes tearful from the smarting wounds.

"By Jove! you're a wreck! It's a shame!" cried the young man. "I'll whip Nixie."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," said Barbara, with spirit. "How did he know I was coming up—coming up like a flower—at that moment? You might as well whip me! Nobody is to blame, and I'll be all right when I've washed, and sewed, and plastered, and done a few other things to myself and my clothing."

"Well, you're plucky," said the youth, admiringly. "I'm a doctor in embryo, full fledged next June. I'll take you in and fix you up. Do you—you don't live here?"

"We shall to-morrow; I'm a new boarder," said Barbara. "Oh, I hope my plants are n't broken! Can they be repotted? We've become poor, and I ought not to have bought them. Why on earth does n't that boy get up? Is he killed?" she demanded, realizing suddenly that her companion in misery was still lying with his head in the basket, under a debris of flower-pots.

"It's why *in* earth, rather," laughed the

medical student. "Here, you boy, are you alive? You're buried all right! Get up."

The inert boy gathered himself slowly together. "Well, I'll be darned!" he said.

"You'll have to be," cried the doctor, sitting down to laugh, and pointing to the rent across the shoulders of the listless youngster's jacket.

"What ailed that dog? Did he have a fit?" drawled the boy, scowling at Nixie, who slunk behind Barbara self-consciously.

"He was n't a dog; he was a cat — a pult," shouted the doctor, rocking to and fro, laughing.

"Oh, please help me into the house!" cried Barbara, half laughing, half crying. Several people had paused to gaze, grinning sympathetically at the scene.

"Oh, I beg your pardon! What an idiot to keep you standing here!" cried the medical student, jumping up. "Here, hustle these plants into your basket," he added to the boy. "They're not broken; we can fix them up all right. Where's my key? There you are! Walk in. Get into the house, Nixie, you crazy pup; you've lost your walk. Leave those plants in the hall, boy, and rush back to your shop and tell your employer you want as many pots as you started out with, and a bag of loam; hurry back with them. Now, Mrs. Black — Mrs. Black, where are you?"

"Here," said the landlady, emerging from the rear. "Why, Miss Wyndham, what has happened?"

"Introduce us, please; we met on the steps," said Barbara's new acquaintance.

"Miss Wyndham, Dr. Leighton," said the bewildered Mrs. Black, automatically.

"Happy to have the honor, Miss Wyndham. There was a mix-up on the steps; there's some of it there yet. Let me have some warm water and a sponge, please. Miss Wyndham, take off your hat and have your face washed," said the unabashed boy.

"Not by you," said Barbara.

"Precisely. I'm almost a doctor, and I'm going to see that no dirt is left in your wounds to scar you. Don't be foolish, Miss Wyndham; it's not precisely a ceremonious occasion."

Barbara submitted with no further demur;

and soon her face was adorned with court-plaster laid on in a plaid pattern.

"Shall I be scarred?" she asked, surveying anxiously the crisscross lines on the bridge of her nose.

"Not a bit," said Dr. Leighton, cheerfully. "Mrs. Black might give you a cup of tea, to brace you up."

"Yes," said Mrs. Black, without enthusiasm.

"No, thanks; I hate tea, and I'll be all right. There's the boy with the new pots," said Barbara.

"Let me help you to get the plants potted, and I'll settle with the boy — because it's all Nixie's fault," said the young doctor. "Not a word; get to work, Miss Wyndham."

He placed papers on the floor in the rear hall, apparently oblivious to Mrs. Black's icy disapproval, which inexperienced Barbara found oppressive.

"My father and your father were friends," said the young fellow, packing the earth around a begonia. "I knew you were coming here to board, and I know about the hard blow you've had. It's a shame, and it's all the fault of that scoundrel Abbott."

"Oh, how nice that your father knew papa! That is almost like our being friends," said Barbara, simply. "Yes, it's dreadful for mama to be poor, and for Jessamy. Phyl and I are not going to mind it so much."

"Is Phil your brother?"

"No; Phyllis, it is; she's my cousin, only she's just as much my sister as Jessamy, for she has always lived with us. I'm a year younger than they are. Jessamy's perfectly beautiful, and princessified, and Phyllis is the most unselfish blessing in the world. I'm only Barbara."

"And I'm only Tom; I'm not a doctor yet. It's awfully jolly, your coming here. Mrs. Black gone? Yes. There is n't any one in the house I care to know; the young people are n't my sort. I hope you'll forgive Nixie and me enough to speak to us once in a while," said Tom, getting up and dusting his knees.

"Oh, we shall want to talk to you; Nixie is such a nice dog," laughed Bab.

"Only Nixie? Well, love my dog, love — oh, it's the other way about. Never mind,

though; we can improve old saws. Where are your rooms?"

"First floor from the Milky Way," laughed Barbara. "We hate to have madrina climb so far, but we could n't afford better rooms."

Tom Leighton looked down on the swollen, patched little face with brotherly kindness; respect and pity were in his voice as he said gently: "You will make any room bright and homelike. I see why you took your tumble down the steps so well; you are brave in falling, Miss Barbara."

Barbara stooped suddenly to pat Nixie, hiding her wounded face in his glossy curls. "I'm not always brave," she said huskily. "I am ashamed to think so much about my beautiful room, and home. I feel so little, and so lost, in this boarding-house."

"Poor little woman!" said Tom Leighton. "Try to feel you have one friend in it. I have two sisters, and it was lonely for me when I left home. Good-by, now; we shall meet tomorrow."

They shook hands, feeling like old friends, and Nixie sat up to shake hands too, though the dignity of his farewell was much impaired by a surreptitious lick of his quick red tongue on Bab's chin.

Tom departed, whistling, to give Nixie his postponed walk. He found himself seeing a tilted nose adorned with court-plaster, and brown eyes, wistful like Nixie's, all down the street. "She's plucky, simple, and frank; just the girl to be a fellow's good chum," he thought. "What luck they're coming to the Blackboard!"—Tom's name for his residence.

Bab finished her tasks, and returned to Mrs. Van Alyn's with glowing accounts of the jolly boy who had patched her up, and of the little dog who had undone her.

"There are two nice things in our new home," she said, "and I believe we'll be happy in spite of fate."

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### MAKING THE BEST OF IT.

"I DON'T know where to put another thing," said Mrs. Wyndham, pushing aside a hat-box to get room to sit on the rocking-chair, and casting a despairing glance from the shallow

closet, already full, to the floor, scattered with the heterogeneous contents of two trunks, in the midst of which Barbara was sitting.

A scream from the next room prevented Bab replying to her mother, and Nixie bounded through the open door, triumphantly worrying a slipper. He recognized Barbara, and dropping his prize, made a leap toward the pretty face he had been the means of damaging before she, from her disadvantage-point on the floor, could stop him.

Tom Leighton appeared immediately, calling Nixie, with no result, for Bab had her arms around the wriggling black bit of enthusiasm, hugging him.

"Mama, this is the doctor who repaired me so nicely; Dr. Leighton, my mother," said Barbara.

"Please don't think me intrusive, Mrs. Wyndham," said Tom, stepping forward to take the delicate hand extended to him. "I am the son of John Leighton, a friend of your husband, and I wanted to ask if I could be of use in getting you in order. I'm a jack-of-all-trades who has boarded long enough to have learned dodges."

"I remember your father," said Mrs. Wyndham, cordially. "It is very pleasant to find a friend among strangers. I don't see what you can do, unless you build a closet. This tiny cubby Bab and I must share is already overflowing, yet just look!" And Mrs. Wyndham made a comprehensive gesture toward the littered floor.

"I suppose we've too many clothes, but we don't dare give away one thing. We may never be able to buy any more, and we're going to get patent patterns, and make over this stock until we're old and gray. I expect that to be soon, however, if I have to sew," said Bab, scrambling to her feet and tossing up Nixie's purloined slipper for him to catch.

"A dog broke and entered—entered anyway—and stole Jessamy's slipper—oh, I beg pardon," said Phyllis, stopping short in the doorway at the unexpected apparition of Tom.

"My niece, Miss Phyllis Wyndham. And my elder daughter, Jessamy, Dr. Leighton," added Mrs. Wyndham, as Jessamy followed Phyllis.

"I came to ask if you had any idea what Jessamy and I could do with our clothes,

aunty," said Phyllis. "We have n't begun to make an impression on the room, yet the closet and bureau are full."

"Not I; Bab and I are in the same plight," said Mrs. Wyndham. "How do people manage in such narrow space!"

"You 'll have to have a wigwam," said Tom.

"A wigwam! That would have no closets at all; and, besides, where could we build it in New York?" laughed Phyllis.

"In that corner. I 'll make it," said Tom. "It's a corner shelf, with hooks in the under side and a curtain around it. Then you want a divan—a woven-wire cot-bed with the legs cut off, fastened by hinges to a box. We could upholster it ourselves. You would be surprised to see what it would hold. Then, if one of you were ill, it would be useful as a couch."

"There spoke the doctor," said Jessamy. "I suppose we shall have to have a trunk in each room besides," she added ruefully.

"Why not put that flat-topped trunk in the window, case it in with boards, cover it with felt, and use it as a book-stand?" suggested Tom.

"Well, you *are* a genius!" cried Bab, in open admiration, while Phyllis sang softly under her breath, to the tune of "St. Patrick's Day in the Morning":

"All hail to the doctor who seems to be able  
To mend up a nose or to make up a table!  
We gladly would cheer him, but that it seems risky,  
For cheers in a boarding-house might be too frisky."

"Well, I never!" laughed Tom. "Say, was that—of course it had to be improvised?"

"Oh, Phyl is a genius," said Jessamy, proudly. "One of these days her name will be in all the magazines, and at last in the encyclopedia."

"And likely in oblivion," added Phyl, while at that instant a cheery voice cried, "First aid to the injured!" and Ruth Wells "burst into the gloom like an arc-light," Barbara said, jumping up to hug her rapturously.

"No, don't; I've tacks and a hammer here," said Ruth, struggling free. "I knew you had no closets, or none worth calling one, so I came down to show you how to make a charity."

"A what?" asked Jessamy.

"A charity; it covers a multitude of things,

you see," laughed Ruth. "You take a board,—we can get one downstairs probably,—saw it to the right length, and nail it in a corner. Then you screw hooks—"

"In the under side; we know," Phyllis interrupted. "Only Dr. Leighton says it's a 'wigwam.' This is Dr. Leighton, and Nixie—Miss Ruth Wells," she added.

In five minutes the little room was ringing with fun. The "charitable wigwam"—Phyllis's compromise on its name—could not be made at once, for lack of boards; but the young people managed to cover up their dismal first impressions of the bleak side of life, and this was making a real "charity," as Jessamy pointed out in bidding Ruth good night.

The wigwam was made, in the end, the divan too, and the Wyndhams began to learn to adjust themselves to the new conditions. Tom had become almost one of themselves, Nixie a necessity and no longer a luxury, as Bab noted. Tom was such a bright, honest, boyish creature that no greater piece of good fortune could well have befallen the girls in their trouble than his friendship, a fact their mother recognized gratefully. As to Tom himself, the motherly kindness of Mrs. Wyndham, the sweet, frank companionship of the girls, were to the young fellow who had loved his own mother and sisters well a boon which he could hardly enjoy enough.

Winter was coming on, and, for the first time in their lives, the Wyndhams were obliged to try to make old answer for new in the matter of garments.

"Not a penny must be spent this season," declared Jessamy, sternly. "A year hence we may earn new clothes."

All the summer garments were laid away in the new divan. "Never throw away a winter thing in the spring, nor a summer thing in the fall," advised Ruth, that little woman wise in ways and means. "You can't tell how anything looks out of its season, nor what you may want. Set up a scrap-box, and tuck everything into it; it's ten to one you 'll be grateful for the very thing you thought least hopeful. Many a time I've all but hugged an old faded ribbon because its one bright part was found to be just the right shade and length to line a collar."

The scrap-box, therefore, was established, and easily filled from a stock not yet depleted. Jessamy's artistic talents developed in the direction of hats. Ruth taught her to take the long wrists of light suède gloves which were past wearing and stretch them over a frame for the crowns of especially pretty hats.

Jessamy made a hat apiece, with crowns of glove-wrists and rims of puffed velvet, trimmed with feathers and bows from the new scrap-box; each was different, yet each a "James Dandy," according to Tom's authoritative verdict.

Dressmaking was a more serious matter, but the three Wyndhams essayed it with the courage of ignorance. Ruth brought down mysterious paper patterns, "perforated to confuse the innocent," Bab said, and announced that she had come for a dress-parade. Her friends were still too unversed in being poor to realize that when she came thus Ruth was sacrificing her own good to theirs, since her time meant money, and little Ruth's pockets jingled only when she spent long days at her needle.

"Get out all last year's glories," commanded Ruth, perched on the foot-board of Jessamy and Phyllis's bed. "That's a pretty dark-blue cloth suit; whose is that?"

"Phyllis's; it was nice, but she tried it on the other day, and it's full in the skirt," said Jessamy.

"I would n't dare touch anything so tailor-made; if we ripped it we could never give it the same finish. But we could take out the gathers and lay a box-plait in the back; that will make it flatter — more in style," cried Ruth, with sudden illumination. "Now is n't it true that there's good blown to some one on all winds? If you had n't stoves in your rooms you would n't have a place to heat irons, and don't I know the impossibility of getting irons from the lower regions when one is boarding?"

"What does 'lower regions' mean? It sounds doubtful," inquired Tom, from the doorway.

"Go away; this is a feminine occasion — no boys allowed," cried Ruth.

"Mysteries of Isis?" suggested Tom. "I only want a buttonhole sewed up; would n't the goddess allow that?"

"Yes," said Phyllis, holding out her hand

for the collar Tom waved appealingly. "It is rather in the line of the service about to begin in this temple. We are going into dress-making."

"You 'll succeed; you can do anything," said Tom, watching Phyllis's fingers as she twitched the thread in a scientific manner, drawing the gaping buttonhole together.

"Those laundry people apparently dry collars by hanging them on crowbars thrust through the buttonholes. Could n't I help your dress-making? I know there are bones in waists; maybe I could set them."

The four girls groaned. "Such a pale, feeble little jokelet!" sighed Bab. "Take it to the hospital to be measured for crutches."

"Yes; here's your collar. Run away and play with the other little boys; we're busy. By and by, if you're good, we may let you take out bastings," said Phyllis.

"Jupiter! That sounds familiar," sighed Tom. "My mother used to say just that when I was seven. Much obliged for the collar. When you want me for the bastings, sing out. I'll pardon your impertinence in consideration of service rendered." And Tom disappeared.

"Phyl will do very well with the blue, then," said Ruth, resuming practicalities. "What are your prospects, Other Two?"

"Jessamy's gray with chinchilla is as good as new, but I spilled something on this brown of mine right down the front, and I have n't a smidge of the goods," said Bab, sadly.

"A what?" murmured Ruth, absently, wrinkling her brow over the problem. "I have it!" she cried, slipping to the floor from her perch with a triumphant little shout.

"Eureka, Miss Archimedes! What is it?" asked Phyllis.

"Braid!" cried Ruth. "We'll get the narrowest silk soutache; Jessamy shall draw a design; Bab, you shall braid the entire front breadth of your skirt, resolving at each stitch to be neater in future. And now for house wear," Ruth continued, while Bab made a wry face at the prospect before her.

"I thought perhaps we could make waists out of these skirts; they would be pretty with our cloth skirts," said Phyllis, doubtfully, turning over a heap of bright-colored fancy silks.

"Could! Of course we can; let's rip them now," said Ruth, whipping out her little scissors.

The eight hands made quick work of the ripping, and Ruth cut out three waists by the tissue-paper patterns she had brought, pinned and basted them together, and left her friends to carry out her instructions.

Phyllis proved adept at the new art, Jessamy succeeded fairly, but Bab had a hard time with her waist. Seams puckered and drew askew, because of her reckless way of sewing them up in various widths, and she felt aggrieved when the waist proved one-sided in trying on. As to sleeves, Bab's were bewitched. The poor child basted, tried on, ripped and tried again, refusing all help in her determination to be independent, till her cheeks were purple, and throwing the waist down, she cried forlornly.

Tom surprised her in this tempest, and laughed at her till she longed to flay him. Then, sincerely repentant for having aggravated her woes, he humbly begged her pardon, and took her for a walk with Nixie to calm her ruffled nerves. When she returned Phyllis had disregarded her wishes and basted in the refractory sleeves for her, which, like everything else, had yielded to Phyllis's charm and gone meekly into place.

There was real pleasure to the girls in using their wits for these things; there were compensations in poverty, they found. But the ugly side remained: the jealousy of three girls who wore photograph-buttons, and were the Wyndhams' opposites, at table as well as literally; the landlady's insinuations that she considered the rate of payment from the Wyndhams insufficient to remunerate her for the immense, though to them imperceptible, generosity with which she served them.

And Mrs. Wyndham was ailing, fretting her heart out over the present situation and her poor girls' future. But the most serious aspect of the anxieties closing in around the Wyndhams was that, in spite of all their prudence, money slipped away; laundry bills took on alarming proportions, and they had never dreamed how fast five-cent car-fares could swell into as many dollars. Although they had taken care to make their expenditures come well within their income, they saw that there was not

going to be enough to meet an emergency, should it arise; and Jessamy and Phyllis talked till midnight many a night, discussing how they should put their young shoulders to the wheel and join the great army of wage-earners.

## CHAPTER V.

### PHYLLIS AND BARBARA ENTER THE LISTS.

AUNT HENRIETTA always stayed until November in her cottage near Marblehead. She said that she never enjoyed the ocean until she was alone with it, and Jessamy suggested afterward that it was a trifle hard on the ocean—a severe remark for Jessamy, whose genuinely high standards of good breeding forbade her unkind comments on others, even on Aunt Henrietta when she was most trying.

Immediately on her return to town Mrs. Hewlett came to look up "her fallen kindred," as Barbara said. That young lady went down to the parlor to conduct her great-aunt to her mother. "It would make a lovely title for an improving book for the young, would n't it?" she said, turning from the glass, where she had been inspecting the last faint trace of the mishap to her nose. "'Little Barbara's Upward Leading,' or 'Toward the Skies,' or 'Helped Upward,' or 'Mounting Heavenward,' or even simply 'Uplifted.'"

"Barbara, I am ashamed of you!" said her mother, as severely as she could, while trying not to laugh.

"Now, Bab, do be nice," pleaded Jessamy.

"Nice! I'd like to know what could be nicer than to plan moral little titles like those?" said Bab, in an injured voice. "But don't worry. I'll be a sweet morsel when I get down there."

"You look thinner," said Aunt Henrietta, when Barbara had delicately touched the unresponsive cheek offered her to kiss.

"I am thinner, aunt. We're none of us waxing fleshly. Black Sally's cooking was more comforting than our present fare," said Bab.

"H'm! Where under heavens are your rooms?" demanded Mrs. Hewlett.

"Just there, Aunt Henrietta—right under heavens, on the top floor," laughed Barbara.



"Do you mean to say you've taken your delicate mother up all those flights? You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!" said her great-aunt.

"What could we do, aunt?" asked Barbara, meekly, though her cheeks reddened. "We were not able to make any boarding-house-keeper give us better rooms at our price for mama's sake."

"Do? You ought to be earning money—three great healthy girls, and Phyllis only a niece-in-law of your mother's, besides! I came to talk to you about this," said Mrs. Hewlett.

"Please wait till we get upstairs. I fancy there are always ears about here," said Bab, and led the way to their own quarters.

"Excelsior is our motto, aunt," she said, pausing at the head of the second flight, and finding malicious pleasure in her relative's labored breathing.

"Well, Emily, the consequences of your imprudence are severe. I am sorry to find you thus. You don't look well," was Aunt Henrietta's greeting to Mrs. Wyndham. "Now, I want to get down to business without delay," she added, removing her splendid furs. "You are living wretchedly to keep these girls fine ladies. You always spoiled them, Emily; but your weakness should really have some limit. It is outrageous for you to climb all these stairs that a slender income may support four people. These girls should contribute to you, not be a drain upon you. You can't be poor and be fine ladies all at once."

"We hope that we can be, aunt," said Jessamy, "but you are mistaken if you think we wish to spare ourselves at our mother's expense."

Only Mrs. Wyndham's hand holding Bab's wrist tight kept that small torpedo from exploding. "This question has been discussed among us, aunt," said Mrs. Wyndham, quietly, though her voice trembled. "Jessamy has determined on her course. She has talent, and we think will do good book illustrations. She is going to fit herself for her work. From the first Jessamy has declared that she should prepare herself to do something well."

"Jessamy has sense," said Aunt Henrietta, surveying the girl with something like approbation. "She is so pretty that she will undoubt-

edly marry before she follows any occupation long. I only hope she will remember her necessities, and marry well."

"If you mean by *well* a good man whom she loves and trusts, I hope so too, Aunt Henrietta," said Mrs. Wyndham, with heightened color. "My trouble would be bitter indeed if I thought it would lead one of my girls to marry for wealth or ambition."

"Sentimentality! You were never practical, Emily," said Aunt Henrietta, impatiently; but more pressing interests than merely possible marriage prevented her stopping to quarrel. "How about the other two?"

"I agree with Aunt Henrietta that I, at least, should be earning money," said Phyllis.

"Not you any more than me, Phyl," cried Bab, with more warmth than correctness.

"Well, I cut an advertisement from the morning paper for Barbara to answer," said Aunt Henrietta, producing a clipping. "Answer it now, and I'll post the letter when I go. It would probably be easy employment, and you are too flighty for most things."

"Thanks, Aunt Henrietta," commented Barbara, spearing the slip to the pincushion with a hat-pin. "I'll answer it; not just now, though."

"Oh, fancy my little Bab, my baby, going down to business every day!" cried Mrs. Wyndham.

"There's your foolish pride again, Emily," said Mrs. Hewlett, sternly. "Your daughters are no better than other people's daughters."

"It is not pride," said Mrs. Wyndham, stung to self-defense. "Unwomanly women are a misfortune to themselves and all the community, and it is impossible to knock about the world without losing something of that dear and delicate loveliness which is fast going out of fashion at best. If it can be avoided, I think no girl should be placed in the thick of the fight, striding through the world in fierce competition with men."

"If it can be avoided—precisely; but it cannot be avoided," said Aunt Henrietta, calmly; "for none of your relatives can afford to help you, Emily."

"Help! When did I ever dream of wanting or being willing to accept help, aunt?" cried Mrs. Wyndham, hysterically. "But if I prefer



to practise stern self-denial to keep my girls sheltered until such time as they can help me in more feminine ways than going into business offices, is that wrong?"

"Not wrong," said Aunt Henrietta, with exasperating soothing in her voice, and entire conviction of being right, "but utterly foolish and impractical. Now, I have a proposition for Phyllis. I spoke of it when I first heard you were ruined. An acquaintance of mine is looking for some one to read French with her daughter and three of her young friends. She will pay a girl twenty-five dollars a month for two hours' reading every afternoon. Fortunately, Phyllis's French is perfect, and that is a feminine employment, and so ought to satisfy you, Emily."

Mrs. Wyndham twisted her handkerchief nervously. This was bringing poverty home to her. She clung tenaciously, poor lady, to the hope of sheltering her little brood, and no amount of privation seemed to her like thrusting the burden on them as did their going out into the world to earn their living.

"I'll try it, aunt," said Phyllis.

"That is right," said Mrs. Hewlett, rising, well pleased at finding her grand-nieces so reasonable—"reasonable" meaning, to her mind, as to most others under like circumstances, ready to accept her advice. "I wrote this introductory line on the back of my visiting-card. You will find Mrs. Haines at that number East Forty — Street, just out of Fifth Avenue. You will do well to apply at once."

"You won't mind if Phyllis mentions that she is your niece in applying?" inquired Jessamy, with intent hidden under her gentle manner.

But satire was lost on Aunt Henrietta. "Not at all; you are only my grand-nieces, and nothing of the sort could affect my social position," she said. Then she went away, leaving a perturbed roomful behind her.

"Now, let me tell you, my dearest aunty-mother, that I'm glad to read the French," said Phyllis. "Twenty-five dollars a month will nearly pay my board, and I'd be happier to feel I were helping. It won't be the end of my career, I hope, but it will answer for a beginning. I honestly think our metallic great-

aunt is right—that we ought to be bettering matters, rather than settle down satisfied to such a life as this."

Mrs. Wyndham was crying softly. "To think that if I had heeded Mr. Hurd we should have enough!" she moaned.

"If—if, madrina! What is the use of ifs now?" cried Barbara. "You did what you thought right, and we can't bear to have you reproach yourself. I'll answer that advertisement, and we'll try to enter the lists to fight for you like true knights—pity we're girls, for it spoils my fine simile."

"I think not, Babbie baby; a knightly spirit is quite as often in a girl's breast as in a boy's," said her mother, kissing her.

"The worst of it is that I feel so mean and selfish to let you both help while I idle," said Jessamy. "But I honestly believe I can do more by waiting and following my natural bent. You won't think I'm shirking? When even little Bab is trying to earn her living I feel guilty."

"Even little Bab—who is anything but even—is only a year younger than you, miss," said Bab; while Phyllis, putting her arms around Jessamy, kissed her and said: "No one would ever suspect you of not playing fair, my crystal cousin."

Phyllis went forth in her blue gown the next day "to secure the young ideas which in the end she would probably want to shoot," Bab said.

She found four foolish girls of fifteen and a newly rich woman, in the person of Mrs. Haines and her daughter and that daughter's friends. They were only too glad to secure a Miss Wyndham for their tutor, a fact even Phyllis's inexperience could not fail to perceive; the arrangement between them was made without loss of time.

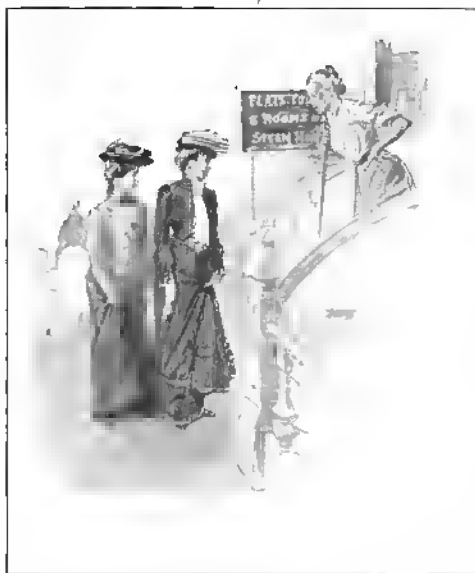
"I am engaged, girls," said Phyllis, coming, with very red cheeks, into the room on her return. But she did not say how disagreeable she had found her recent encounter.

Barbara heard nothing from the answer she had made to the advertisement Aunt Henrietta had brought her, so she applied to Mr. Hurd for aid. The little lawyer obtained for her the position of cashier with a friend of his own,

with whom the young girl would at least be secure from many of the drawbacks to a business career which her mother dreaded for her.

But, to Bob's unspeakable mortification, she

had been right when in the beginning of their trouble she had said they were not able to compete with those they had thought inferior, in doing the serious work of the world.



THE EXPERIMENT IN SHARING OF GRACE. (SEE PAGE 133.)

found that she was incompetent to fill the position. She made change slowly, often wrongly, and at night her columns would not add up right, no matter how often she went over them, nor how carefully she counted her fingers. At the end of a week she came home crestfallen, having been kindly dismissed, to be comforted and petted by her mother and the girls. Accomplishments she had, but practical knowledge, especially of arithmetic, she lacked. Phyllis

After this experiment Mr. Hard placed Barbara in an office where she was to address envelopes. This she did well, for her fingers and brain were quick; but she was far from an expert, and her salary was but three dollars and a half a week. Fortunately, the office was within walking distance, so that no car-fare had to come from this magnificent result of six days' labor.

Jessamy worked hard at her drawing, and Phyllis went daily to her tutoring, saying so

little of her experiences that her family concluded that they were not wholly pleasant. But one bright ray of hope shone out of the gloom for Phyllis. A little story which she had written was accepted by one of the large syndicates, and paid for—fifteen dollars. The sum was not large, though it was more than half of what she was paid monthly by Mrs. Haines; but the glory, and the hope it shed on the future, were invaluable. On the whole, Phyllis and Barbara found their entrance into the lists not easy, and the blows of the tourney hard, but they kept on with courage fine to see.

They all felt that in some way their skies would brighten when Mrs. Van Alyn returned; she was their "Lady from Philadelphia," and would be sure to find a way through their difficulties. But Mrs. Van Alyn had gone to England to stay until after the holidays, and in the meantime the Wyndhams struggled on.

## CHAPTER VI.

### MARK TAPLEV'S KIND OF DAYS.

PHYLLIS was finding her occupation trying. The girls were too near her own age to be easily controlled by her; indeed, they had never been under control in their lives, and study was not part of their programme. They wished to learn only so much French as would serve them in a coming European trip, and this they seemed to expect their young instructor to get into their brains with no effort on their own part.

But the hardest thing about her new life to Phyllis was the insight it gave her to a manner of living which shocked and tortured her; for Phyllis was conscientious, and the first actual contact with the worldly side of the world is bitter to such as she. Although they were three years younger than Phyllis, and that at a time of life when a year's difference in age marks a wide divergence, they were far older than she in many ways. They discussed flirtations, theaters, trashy novels, while munching chocolates during their lesson, betraying the most sordid ambition, till innocent and honest Phyllis was horrified. She went home daily heavy in heart and foot, loathing the atmosphere from which she had come, and wonder-

ing if the world, from which she had hitherto been shielded, was actually governed by such standards as she heard advocated in the Haines household.

Tom, before long, saw that she was looking downhearted and ill, and he made it his business to come home her way and meet her, trying to cheer her into forgetfulness of the annoyances of which he only guessed, for Phyllis could not reconcile it with her idea of honor to talk to any one of what she saw in the home to which she had been admitted. Yet she longed to ask some one if all the world, save her own narrow one, was like this new one. Jessamy and Bab knew no better than she herself, and her aunt was too ill to be troubled. So one day, after an especially trying afternoon, Phyllis met Tom with a keen sensation of relief as well as of pleasure; he looked so manly and reliable that her troubles broke over their barriers almost in spite of herself.

"It's no use, Tom," she said; "I've been trying not to tell you, but I must. Is it I or the world that's out of joint?"

"On general principles, I can assure you that it's not you, Phyllis; you're all right. But, if I might, I should like to have something more explicit," said Tom, looking very kindly down on the flushed, earnest face.

Phyllis began at the beginning, and poured forth to Tom all the matters which had distressed her in the Haines household, ending with a conversation of that afternoon.

"Well, what do you want me to tell you, Phyllis?" asked Tom. "Surely you don't question whether you or heartless, flirting, worldly girls are right?"

"No, not that; right is right, and wrong is wrong—" began Phyllis.

"Always," broke in Tom.

"Yes, I know; but what makes me down-right sick is the fear that dear aunty has kept us shut away from a world that is full of this sort of thing—that it is all like this," cried Phyllis. "Are we different from the rest of the world? These months have frightened me."

"Not much wonder," said Tom, heartily. "Poor little soul! Now look here, Phyllis; you're not different from all the world, but you're different from lots of it. The best never

gets run out, but it often runs low. You 've been shown the highest standards in everything, and they can't be common. It's much easier to be bad than good for people who start crooked. You started straight, you and Jessamy and Bab. All you 've got to do is to be yourself, and not worry. Keep your own ideas and steer by them, and let the rest go. Do you suppose I don't see heaps and piles of things I hate? More than you ever will, because a fellow runs up against the world as no girl does. I'd like to be able to tell you I see none but sweet, modest, true girls; but, honest, there are lots of worldly ones. Girls exasperate me, though I feel mean to say it; they would n't if I did n't think they were so much nicer than we are when they *are* nice. You see, Phyl, girls don't understand that the whole world is in their hands; we're all what women, young and old, make us. Now, you and I had good mothers and sisters. When I went away my oldest sister—she 's past thirty—talked to me. 'Shut your eyes to the bold girls, Tom,' she said, 'and take none for a friend you would not like for your sisters' friend. Keep your ideals, and be sure there will always be sweet, wholesome girls in the world to save it.' So I have been shutting my eyes to the strong-minded sisterhood, and the giddy ones too, and just when I was getting too lonely, and needed you, the Wyndhams turned up, thank Heaven! So you 'll find it, Phyl; it 's a queer, crooked old world, but there are straight folk in it. Keep your ideals, miss, as my sister told me, and 'gang your ways.' And don't take it too hard that there 's wrong and injustice in the world; that 's being morbid. You 'll get used to it; it 's the first plunge that costs; the world 's like the ocean in that. There 's heaps of good lying around, even mixed up with the bad, though that 's what no young person sees at first. You know I 'm ever so much older than you, because I 've been out in the fray some time. Don't get to thinking it 's a bad world; it 's a good one. The Lord said so when he made it. Thus endeth my first lesson. I never talked so long in all my life, not at one stretch. I sha' n't do so again very soon. Come into this drug-store and have some hot coffee; you look fagged."

"You 're such a comfort, Tom," said Phyllis. "I feel much better. There was no use in talking to the girls, because we all know no more and no less than one another, but I did want straightening out. And aunty looks so ill lately, don't you think so?"

Tom looked serious. "I think she is ill, Phyllis," he said. "There 's nothing the matter with her except one of the worst things: she is exhausted, worn out with fret and trouble, and she does n't get enough nourishment; she needs nursing."

"Oh, I see it, Tom," cried Phyllis, as they left the soda-fountain. "What can I do?"

"Take care of yourself, for one thing; you don't look right, either," said Tom.

"I feel dragging; that 's the only word I know for it," said Phyllis.

"I 'm going to fix you up some quinine and calisaya, with malt; I 'm not pleased with you of late, Miss Phyllis," said Tom.

Four days later Phyllis trailed her weary way homeward. The end of her first month's labor had come; the twenty-five dollars she had earned lay in her pocket-book in four new bills. Her head ached, her knees felt strangely unreliable, her spine seemed to be some one else's, so burning and painful it felt in its present place, and her eyes played her tricks by showing her objects in false positions and sizes, occasionally flaring up and then darkening completely for a few dreadful seconds.

Jessamy met her at the door with an anxious face. "Mama has given out wholly, Phyl," she said. "She is in bed, and frightens me, she looks so weak, and her heart beats unevenly and feebly."

"That 's bad," said Phyllis, so indifferently that Jessamy stared in amazement, then saw with utter sinking of her heart that Phyllis looked desperately ill herself. If Phyllis, the rock on which they all leaned, gave out now, what should she do?

"What is the matter, Phyl?" she asked, putting her arm around her cousin.

"I have no idea. My head aches unbearably; it is a headache that reaches to the soles of my feet," answered Phyllis, miserably. "I 've twenty-five dollars in my purse; that will pay for several visits, won't it? Send for Dr. Je-

rome, I mean," said Phyllis, uncertainly. She dropped her hat on the floor beside her, and pushed her hair back from her temples as she spoke, resting both elbows on her knees. "One of the girls is ill; the doctor thought it might be typhoid," she smiled.

"Is that contagious?" demanded Jessamy, her breath shortening.

"I don't know. Don't be afraid, Jessamy. I'm too full of pain for anything else to get in. I couldn't catch it," said Phyllis, with no intention of being humorous.

Jessamy waited to hear no more. Running across to Tom's room, she knocked impatiently.

"Oh, Tom, dear Tom, do come quick!" she cried. "Phyllis has come home so ill that I'm more frightened about her than about mama now."

They found Phyllis exactly as Jessamy had left her. Tom felt her pulse, her hands were burning, her pulses galloping. "She must wait till the doctor comes; I'll give her a sedative, but I'd rather not do anything more," said Tom, looking grave. "Get her to bed, and don't look so hopeless, dear girl. Phyllis is possibly going to have the grip,—the real thing, not a cold nodule that name,—and though it is a severe sickness, it does not need such a tragic face to meet it."

But Jessamy would not smile. "One of Phyllis's pupils has a fever; the doctor thinks it may be typhoid; is that contagious?" she asked.

For the life of him Tom could not repress a

slight start; then he bethought himself, and answered cheerfully: "Not a bit; only infectious. Get Phyllis quiet in bed, and try not to borrow trouble."

But as he crossed the hall he shook his head



"TOM HAD CAUGHT CATCH, AND HE WENT ON COOKING THE STEAK." (SEE PAGE 230.)

like an old practitioner. "Not contagious, it is true; but Phyl has been in the same atmosphere as that girl, and may have contracted typhoid under the same conditions," he said, rubbing Nix's head absent-mindedly as the little dog poked it into his hand, recognizing its master's troubled expression. "I don't like it, Nix, old man; I confess I don't like it at all."

Dr. Jerome came. His verdict as to Mrs. Wyndham corroborated Tom's; she needed

careful nursing, nourishing, complete rest, and cheer. And to insure the latter prescription there was Phyllis! On her case the doctor said it was far too early to decide, but — yes, it might be typhoid. He would do all he could to break it up, but Phyllis was seriously ill. There must be a nurse; even though Barbara gave up her employment to help Jessamy, they were both too inexperienced to undertake a case in which everything depended on the nursing.

Barbara came home into the trouble, very tired, and discouraged over her own uselessness. She who had felt so confident that she could do anything had thus far been able to earn only three dollars and a half for many hours' labor; in the old days she had spent that in a week on candies. Jessamy and she had a consultation, at which Tom assisted, as to the present situation. Tom undertook to procure a woman who had nursed in his family, and who, he felt sure, would serve him for less than the usual terms of a professional nurse. "The two patients must be separate, of course," he added. "You and Bab will use my room, and the nurse will take her share of rest where it suits her."

"And where will you sleep, you dear, generous boy?" cried Jessamy.

"I've a friend I can bunk with till you're through with the room," said Tom. "It won't trouble me a bit, so don't call me names, Princess."

Tom's good woman came; she was the kindest soul in the world, and no less competent than kind. Barbara gave up her envelopes to help Jessamy; with two patients she was needed, and even then there were hardly hands enough to render the service required. Tom ran in and out at all hours of the day and night: Jessamy felt that if she lived ninety-nine years she could never repay him for his help and cheer, though she devoted her life to trying to do so.

Mrs. Wyndham lay in that wearying state of feebleness peculiar to exhausted nerves — not in actual danger, except the danger of continued prostration. But Phyllis grew more ill; twice a day the old doctor came to watch her progress, which was steadily downward. Out of the five hundred dollars coming to the Wyndhams quarterly there was an excess over neces-

sary expenditures of about ninety dollars; this was all the capital Jessamy had in hand to meet the present emergency, and underlying her other anxieties was the fear that she should be obliged to borrow of Aunt Henrietta to tide herself through the double illness which had come upon them. Her mother required all sorts of expensive food preparations, and Jessamy realized that her little fund would not carry them further on their hard road than three weeks' distance.

Christmas was coming — the Christmas they had dreaded at best to meet in a boarding-house, the first since they became homeless; but now what a Christmas it was!

Barbara, sitting, as she did every moment that the nurse would intrust Phyllis to her, close by her cousin's bed, thought with falling tears of what Phyllis had always said, that nothing mattered while they had one another. What if they were not always to have one another? What if Phyllis herself, dear, unselfish, sweet Phyllis, was to be the one to go away, leaving a void forever which no one could fill? Bab the light-hearted refused to fulfil her title, but sat stonily looking forward to Phyllis's death. Jessamy, more equable, kept up a little courage, but for her also hope was hard.

And so Christmas Eve dawned grimly enough upon the two poor girls, and on them only, for Mrs. Wyndham was too weak to give more than a sick woman's passing thought to the day, and for Phyllis in her delirium there was neither day nor night.

Dr. Jerome came that morning, and looked more anxious than ever. "Your mother is doing fairly," he said, "but this little girl does not mend; the typhoid symptoms increase, and I'm not heading it off yet. Nurse, if you will get your scissors, I think this heavy hair must come off."

"Oh, don't, please don't cut off Phyllis's beautiful hair!" cried Bab, while Jessamy clasped her hands in mute appeal.

"Nonsense, Bab; it will relieve her more than you can imagine," said Tom, sharply. He had followed the doctor into the room. "It would fall after such an illness; it is better for the hair to cut it: but if it were n't it would still have to be done. Pray be sensible."

The nurse brought the scissors, and with a few strokes the long, warm, dark masses of hair lay on the quilt.

"That's better," said the doctor, as Phyllis moved her head as though at once conscious of relief. He left a few additional directions for the nurse, and went away.

Phyllis's hair lay on a paper; the sunlight, resting on it, brought out its rich reddish tint. Tom lifted a tress tenderly. "Poor, sweet Phyllis!" he said.

Jessamy turned away to the window without a word, and Bab stifled a sob in the table-cover. What a Christmas Eve, indeed!

## CHAPTER VII.

### TAKING ARMS AGAINST A SEA OF TROUBLES.

CHRISTMAS morning dawned clear and cold, with a few errant snowflakes drifting on the wind, as if to show New York that the great Northwest had not forgotten her, but had only delayed its Christmas box of winter weather for a little while.

It is hard wholly to escape the universal joy in the Christmas air, and, in spite of anxiety, Jessamy and Barbara felt more hopeful than they had the night before. Then little crumbs of comfort floated their way in the morning, as the snowflakes were floating without. Beautiful flowers came to Mrs. Wyndham from Mr. Hurd and other friends, and the expressman had left packages for the girls late the preceding night, which the chambermaid with the chronically dust-branded forehead brought up the first thing in the morning. Then the postman came, bringing Christmas greetings to the girls from several old friends, and a letter from Mrs. Van Alyn, with an ivy-leaf from Stratford-on-Avon for Phyllis, a photograph of Botticelli's beautiful little picture of the Nativity, from the National Gallery, for Jessamy, and for Bab an oak-leaf from the sleepy old English town whence the first ancestor of the Wyndhams had sailed away to America two hundred years before. But best and most wonderful of all, he brought a note from Aunt Henrietta, which Jessamy read aloud to Bab after they were upstairs.

"MY DEAR NIECES," it ran: "I am con-

cerned to hear that your mother and Phyllis are ill, though it would be more becoming if you had acquainted me with the fact directly, rather than leave me to learn it circuitously through Mrs. Haines. I trust Phyllis is not going to have typhoid, like the Haines child. Also that your mother will try to overcome her natural weakness. It is a pity she has none of the Wyndham endurance—"

"Yet dear papa died, not madrina," interrupted Bab.

"I should have been to see you," continued Jessamy, "'but that I myself have been suffering. I have had a severe attack of bronchitis, and the doctor thought I should not escape appendicitis—'"

"Mercy! They're not much alike, except in that horrible long *i* sound!" exclaimed Bab, who grew what Tom called "Babbish" the moment pressure on her spirits was relaxed.

"Do be still, Babbie," cried Jessamy, and read on: "'Escape appendicitis; but the symptoms were caused, as you may conjecture, by acute indigestion. When I am able to be out I shall go to see you. In the meantime I send you each a small Christmas remembrance which may be useful to you in your present circumstances. Your affectionate aunt, HENRIETTA HEWLETT.'"

The "small Christmas remembrance" was a check for each member of the family of twenty-five dollars. Jessamy snatched them up greedily. No one knew how she had dreaded applying to Aunt Henrietta for a loan, and now Aunt Henrietta herself had precluded the necessity! A hundred dollars! It would carry them more than two weeks into the new year, when their interest came in; perhaps before this windfall was used they might be able to dispense with the nurse. It is difficult to be hopeful with money anxieties corroding the heart, and with these relieved Jessamy and Bab looked on their two dear patients for the first time with courage, pressing each other's waist with their encircling arms, feeling very grateful for the comfort Christmas had brought them, and something very like love for Aunt Henrietta, who, in spite of ways all her own, had done a generous thing.

Mrs. Black rose to the requirements of the

festival, and gave her "guests" an unwonted feast; Mrs. Wyndham took little bits of the delicate meat around the turkey wishbone with more relish than she had shown for anything since her breaking down.

After dinner Ruth Wells came down, her basket on her arm, like a happy combination of Little Red Riding-Hood and Little Mabel, whose "willing mind" could not have been as ready to serve others as kindly Ruth's. Out of her basket she produced a veil-case for Jessamy, a handkerchief-case for Bab, a glove-case for Phyllis, all embroidered in tiny Dresden flowers on white linen—not in her spare moments, for Ruth had no spare moments, but in those she had pilfered from her work for her friends. And for the sick ones were clear jellies, and a mold of blanc-mange, with bits of holly stuck blithely on the top.

"Oh, Ruth, how could you make all these, and how did you get them down here?" cried Bab.

"That comes of having one's own flat and not boarding," laughed Ruth; "at least, as far as the making goes. As to getting them down, a little more or less, once you have a basket, does n't matter. Your mother looks decidedly brighter."

"Yes; she ate with a little appetite to-day. But Phyllis does n't improve. And oh, Ruth, they have cut off her hair!" said Jessamy.

"Well," said Ruth, stoutly, "what of it? You speak as though it were her head. I suppose it won't be like the raveled-yarn hair on the knit doll I had when I was a little tot; I cut that off when he was going to a party, and was dreadfully grieved that it never grew again. Phyllis's will, I suspect."

"Come and see her," said Jessamy. Ruth followed. She really was a wonderfully comforting girl. Not a shadow of regret could Jessamy and Bab, watching her closely, discover as she looked on poor shorn Phyllis, lying quietly just then. Instead Ruth said cheerily:

"It will probably grow out in little soft curls all over her head, and how pretty she will look!"

And, as if to reward Ruth for her goodness, Phyllis opened her eyes, smiled faintly, and said, in a hardly audible voice: "I'm lazy, Ruth."

It was the first sign of recognition she had given since she had become unconscious, and Jessamy and Bab clutched each other in speechless joy. To be sure, Phyllis said no more, but dropped away again into that mysterious space wherein the sick exist, and Tom had gone away to keep the holidays with his family, so there was no one to whom they could fly to ask just how good a symptom this might be. But the nurse told them that, though it might mean little, it was encouraging, and the eager girls resolved to take it at its highest valuation, to get all the joy they could out of a Christmas not too bright at best.

"Good-by, Ruthy; you are so heartening! I wish madrina could take you for a tonic; I'm sure I don't know any other equal to you," said Bab, as Ruth left them.

The last seven days of the year slipped by with alternations of hope and fear for Phyllis filling Jessamy and Barbara's moments—for Phyllis, because the question of whether she was to throw off the fever or settle down to long typhoid was determining, and Mrs. Wyndham's condition involved no present danger. On the whole, hope predominated: the times in which Phyllis had lucid moments grew more frequent and longer; Dr. Jerome looked more cheerful each day.

But finally, as if she knew that the time of good resolutions and amendment had come, on the closing night of the year Phyllis threw off the last trace of her fever, and lay white and weak, but smilingly conscious, to greet the New Year's dawn.

Tom and Nixie came back to hear the good news, bringing cheer with them. Altogether Jessamy felt that night, when she lay down to sleep, that her troubles were nearly over, and she saw light ahead. She had yet to learn that the long days of convalescence held trials greater than those she had borne.

In the first place, the January days fulfilled the old prophecy of increased cold with greater length, and the little stoves, to which she and Bab offered up holocausts of knuckles and finger-tips, tried them almost past endurance.

"It really is n't the stove that bothers me," said Bab, falling back on her heels as she knelt before it, and raising a discouraged and smutty



face to Jessamy. "The stove is like the rest of us; it would behave better if it could get something to ransome."

That was true; it took constant brushing to keep coal on hand to replenish the fire. Mrs.

Black's interest in the coal question was only to save it, and the result was that the swift-burning cylinder-stoves were perilously low half the time.

The matter of getting food suitable to nonvulgarlescents kept the poor girls' nerves quivering. They bought chops and gave them to Mrs. Black to be cooked, brining the look to do it well; but the meat that had looked so succulent and so tender when it was first appeared dry and blackened, with congealing fat around the edges of the plate, or else was so rare that Phyllis's big hungry eyes filled with tears at the mere sight of it.

Jessamy and Bab tried extracting beef-juce in glass jars with cold water and salt, as Mrs. Wells taught them to do, and they got a unifying-link and cooked chops over their stoves until the nasal old man below them complained to the landlady of the noise of broiling. Jessamy began to have a little feud between her eyes, and her sweet voice grew almost sharp from nervous strain; while Bab, though

she really struggled hard "to be good," as she said, found her naturally quick temper raised beyond her ability to curb it in the effort to obtain justice, if not kindness, for her dear patients, whose recovery depended on prompt care.

For a month these two poor little heroines struggled on in a daily round of petty annoyances—not petty, after all, when one considered what was involved.

"We 're getting awful, Jessamy," said Bab, tensely, one sad night. "We 're getting sharp-tempered, nervous, hard; and I wonder where shall we end?"

"Come in here, guls," was heard in Phyllis's voice, still tremulous, from the next room. "And do bring Tom."

Tom and Nixie had resumed their old quarters since the nurse had gone, and now both the ding and his master came as readily as



"LOOK OUT, TELLER, VOC 'LL TALK!' PHYLLIS SAYS." (DAL BASH 838)

they always did when any one of the Wyndhams called them.

"I heard what you said, Babbie," said Phyllis, motioning Tom to the seat of honor, and welcoming Nixie to her side in the big chair. "I 've been seeing what a hard time you were having, and I want to tell you both what we 're going to do."

"It sounds rather solemn, Phyl, summon-

ing us to a conclave like this. If we 're going to do anything bad, don't tell us to-night," said Jessamy.

"What we 're going to do—or what I 'm going to do—is go to housekeeping," Phyllis said.

There was a shout of laughter from her audience, after a moment of surprised silence.

"You look like housekeeping just now," said Bab.

"I look less like boarding," said Phyllis, stoutly. "Ruth Wells is perfectly right. We should be far better off in a little home of our own, 'be it ever so humble.' It takes strong—no, I mean tough people to get on without home comforts. You and Jessamy are getting utterly worn out, as nervous and fretted as you can be, and if you put half the strength it takes to live this way into healthy housework you would have everything you need, and not be tired, still less cross."

"Phyllis is right!" cried Tom. "It's a miserable way to live."

"Of course I 'm right," said Phyllis. "Now I 've been figuring. It costs us about sixteen hundred a year to live in this wretched way, and I don't know what you are spending besides for these nourishing things aunty and I are having."

"I do," said Jessamy, with a half-humorous, half-genuine sigh.

"I am sure you do, and that it is awful," said Phyllis. "Well, now listen. We are going to take a flat, the best we can find for the money, at forty dollars a month. We are going to have a woman come in two days each week to wash, iron, and sweep, at a dollar and a quarter a day, making about a hundred and twenty-six dollars a year. We are going to cook on gas—Ruth said so—seventy-two dollars more. And we 're going to live plainly, but have nice, wholesome things to eat, and all we want, for six hundred a year—Ruth again, and she knows! And that makes a total of thirteen hundred dollars, allowing a little margin. That's three hundred dollars less than we spend now, and even if it were more, who would n't rather be in her own dear little home, with all scratchy, maddening things and people shut out?"

Phyllis stopped, breathless, and the others

had listened in so much the same condition that it was a moment before any one spoke. Then Bab leaped to her feet, and ran over to hug Phyllis in a rapture. "You dear, quiet, splendid old Phyllistine!" she cried. "It 's just blissfully lovely! To think of you being the one to do it, when you 're still so weak and forlorn!"

"Ask me to tea; have me up to help; let me catch the crumbs from your table," said Tom. "Phyllis, you 're a trump, and you 've saved the day."

"Crumbs from the table!" cried Jessamy, catching her breath. "That 's just it. It 's a dream, Phyl, but how in the world can we do it? There won't be any crumbs from the table, nor anything to eat. We can't do anything, any of us. I 'm not sure mama understands cooking."

"Aunty can direct a cook," said Phyllis; "and I 'm not afraid, with a good cook-book, and Ruth to ask. We can learn a few things, and do them every day, if necessary. It 's better than this, at the worst, and we shall save money, too. If we failed, we could have one servant, and still spend no more than we do now. You and Bab go to look for flats to-morrow. You 'll see I 'm right."

Phyllis's last remark settled the question. If they could afford a servant in case of necessity, there could be no risk in the attempt. Barbara would not admit risk in any case. Tom was unselfishly enthusiastic over the scheme, though he said he dared not think of his loneliness if they left the "Blackboard." But Bab hospitably gave him the freedom of the new apartment, and before they separated for the night the place was rented, furnished, and they had moved in. And, best of all, Tom had promised Phyllis that she should own a kitten.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE TURN OF THE LANE.

JESSAMY and Barbara were ready for their expedition in search of peace by nine o'clock the next morning.

"Phyllis is rather like the centurion in the gospel: she tells one to go, and she goeth, and to another to do this, and she doeth it. That is n't

irreverent, because the centurion was only a Roman soldier—not even a prophet,” said Bab, as she toiled up the elevated-road steps at Thirty-third Street. “I wonder what it is in Phyl we all yield to?”

“She is very decided, with all her quietness, for one thing, and we have learned that she is generally right and pulls us out of difficulties, for another,” said Jessamy. “Wait; I think I’ve two tickets.”

“What does it matter? We shall need them when we’ve moved uptown,” said Bab, airily, as she dashed ahead and deposited ten cents at the ticket-seller’s window.

It was not a wholly attractive section of the city where they found themselves on their arrival at One Hundred and Fourth Street. Jessamy and Bab felt their ardor dampened after they had rung several janitors’ bells in uniformly small vestibules decorated with stenciling on the ceilings and walls, and possessing too many little brass speaking-tubes and electric bells, and, in many cases, too many small children munching cookies and staring, round-eyed, at the strangers.

But Barbara said, “Where there’s scope there’s hope, and New York is large,” and they kept on cheerfully. At last they discovered a house farther uptown, but still below the bend of the elevated road (around which they felt certain their mother would never travel), which looked attractive. The rosy-cheeked German janitor’s wife showed them seven rooms, not large, but not as small as the others they had seen, looking on a quiet street, with the upper entrance to Central Park only two blocks away. The rent of the apartment, they were told, was forty-five dollars a month, but since it was February the janitor thought it could be had for forty. Jessamy and Barbara, unversed in landlords’ ways, trembled lest some one should get their bargain before they had time to report it at home and secure it.

“Oh, girls,” cried Phyllis, on their return, when she had heard of their success, “Mrs. Van Alyn has come; she’s been here. She approves our plan, but she advises us to settle everything without speaking to aunty, for she thinks she is too weak to see anything but its disadvantages. And—and—oh, Jess! oh, Bab! I’m

half crazy. She has some of our dearest things stored away for us, because she felt sure we should sometime have another home: uncle’s chair, Bab’s piano, our desks, tables, photographs, casts—oh, I don’t know what!—out of our dear old home, all ready for this little new one!”

Bab turned white, then took a header into the pillows to smother the irrepressible cry of joy which her mother must not hear, while Jessamy, who had silently mourned her lost treasures more than either of the others, dropped into the rocking-chair, crying for happiness.

It was a great comfort that Mrs. Van Alyn approved the new plan; it made it better if it should go wrong: for Jessamy did not like to assume the entire responsibility of such a radical change of which her mother was to be ignorant. The flat was taken, and then the joy of furnishing began.

New papers, a soft gray-green in the parlor, a rich red, olive, and brown tapestry in the dining-room, with soft imitations of burlaps in the small bedrooms, completely altered the effect given by the ugly papers which had preceded them. Pretty denims, labor-saving as well as pretty, covered the bedroom floors, and the dining-room and parlor floors were stained for a border to their tasteful rugs. The three-foot hall running through the apartment was also stained, and black goatskin rugs, laid at intervals, softened the sound of feet; they were real of their kind, and Jessamy abhorred imitations.

Ruth was called into consultation for kitchen furnishing. She and Barbara spent a delightful morning in a hardware-shop, buying bright tins and fascinating japanned boxes, as pretty in the eyes of the homesick girls as art treasures. Jessamy, Phyllis, and Bab were so wild with delight during these last days they could hardly get through them, so impatient were they to take possession of their kingdom. Tom was not less excited than they; not a day passed without his bringing home some wonderful contribution to the coöperative housekeeping, in which coöperation he claimed his full share.

And at last, on the day before the Wyndhams were to move uptown, Mrs. Van Alyn carried Tom off with her to the apartment, forbidding the girls their own precincts, and with

his help set in place the priceless treasures of old association which her kindness had kept for them from a past more splendid, but which the present promised to equal in happiness.

And thus the great day came. Mrs. Wyndham had been told but two days before of the home awaiting her, and received the news with rather more apprehension than pleasure. Phyllis gave up all thought of returning to Mrs. Haines; they hoped to save under the new arrangement more than she had earned there, and to do this her services were needed at home. Mrs. Van Alyn once more sent her carriage for her friend's use, Mrs. Black "assembled," as Tom said, to see her off, and Phyllis shared her aunt's drive, with refreshments for both invalids to sustain them until they got home. Home!—a word to conjure with, driving illness away. The coachman was bidden take them up through the park at an easy pace, and so, in the carriage in which she had been borne away from her first home, poor Mrs. Wyndham, full of the recollection, too ill and sad to share the girls' enthusiasm, rode away to her new one.

The trunks, and all Tom's mad contributions to the apartment, had gone away early, and as soon as the door had closed on their mother and Phyllis, Jessamy and Bab tore up the long flights to get their hats and jackets and hasten after them.

Bab seized Jessamy around the waist and waltzed her all over both empty rooms, singing at the top of her voice, while the chambermaid pushed her reddish pompadour out of her eyes to see better, and grinned sympathetically; she liked the Wyndhams, and would have rejoiced to get out of bondage herself.

"Come on, Jess! Don't stop for gloves; put them on in the train for once. Got everything? Oh, hurry! We must get there first, and I'm wild to see what Mrs. Van Alyn and that boy did yesterday! Don't stop for gloves, *please*,—I'm going crazy!" cried Bab.

"You're crazy now," said Jessamy; but she tucked her gloves into her coat-pocket, and her voice shook, her cheeks were crimson. "Come, then. Good-by, Nellie; I hope you will be well and happy. Good-by, old room; we might have left you sorrowful instead of rejoicing, and at least I may thank you for that."

Barbara was already half-way downstairs; Jessamy ran after her, and they reached the lower hall breathless, to find Mrs. Black waiting to say farewell.

"I wish you luck," she said, with an air that implied it was a hopeless desire for any one mad enough to leave her sheltering roof. "You'll find housekeeping very different from having no cares and being free to enjoy yourselves. I hope you may be happy, and your ma won't break down under the strain; she can't stand much."

The ride to Harlem seemed endless to the two girls, but at last the tedious journey ended, and once they had turned east out of crowded Columbus Avenue, Jessamy and Bab fairly ran down the street on which their apartment waited them.

They let themselves into the house with their own latch-key. The janitor's wife was cleaning brasses, and said good morning pleasantly, but with no notion of what a great event was happening before her Swabian eyes. How could she have, poor soul, since people move in and out of apartments every day, and few of them are young exiles, hungry for home, come to take possession of the Land of Promise?

Jessamy's heart beat so that she could hardly get upstairs; but Bab honorably waited for her, and would not put the key into the lock—not the general lock of the outer door, solemn as that ceremony had been, but the sacred, blessed lock of their own private entrance. She threw the door open, clutched Jessamy's hand, who returned the pressure with interest, and together they entered.

They ran from room to room, calling each other, sobbing and laughing, and kissing the inanimate things like crazy girls. Phyllis's desk stood in her room, and beside her bed the little rocking-chair Bab loved best held out its arms to her. In the dining-room they found silver they had thought never to see again, and dishes which they knew would be equal to food, whether empty or full, to their mother.

They made their excited way back to the parlor, and Jessamy dropped, exhausted, into the window-seat, which was mysteriously draped in white lace, though they had made up their minds to self-denial in the matter of curtains.

Her eyes rested on her father's chair, and her lips trembled with joy and gratitude. "Oh, the Lord bless that dear, dear Mrs. Van Alyn!" she said, though she usually found such expression impossible.

Barbara opened the piano and laid her hands on the keys. She struck two or three chords of "Home, Sweet Home," and laid her head down on the pretty case to cry the happiest tears she had ever shed.

It was fortunate that Jessamy and Barbara had more than half an hour to await the arrival of the invalids, for neither Phyllis nor their mother was strong enough to encounter them while their excitement was at its height. When they arrived the girls had calmed down enough to open the door quietly and say, with only a little tremor in the voice of each: "Welcome home, mima and Phyllis!"

Phyllis looked white after her drive, but the color rushed from her throat to her short hair at the sight that met her eyes. She did not attempt to go farther than the parlor sofa, where Bab led her, and lay still, in a trance of delight, looking from one dear picture to another, letting the soothing green tone of the room sink into her brain and rest her as if a cool hand had been laid on her throbbing nerves.

Mrs. Wyndham did not get beyond her husband's chair. She sank into it, laid her weary head against the cool leather, and burst into quiet tears. But even the inexperienced girls recognized them for tears that would restore her, standing for the breaking up of the apathy which had been the worst phase of her illness, and they felt certain they had done well in taking matters into their own hands and giving the frail little mother a home once more.

Oh, the joy of preparing that first dinner, to which Ruth and Tom came! Tom had camped out, and he insisted on cooking the steak; Ruth showed the girls how to boil potatoes so that they would neither crumble to bits nor emerge water-soaked from the operation. What bliss it was to Jessamy to make the tea by the venerable rule of one teaspoonful for each cup, and one to the pot! And the unutterable joy of peering into the fat little Japanese teapot later, with an air of experience, to see if it were

drawn! And the still greater happiness of making cocoa for the invalids, in the alluring agate saucepan, brought forth from beneath the kitchen closet to be useful for the first time in its gray satin-finish life!

Bab was delirious—cut a slice of bread, and ran to hug her mother; set the cold water running, and then was saved by Jessamy from filling the pitcher from the hot-water faucet. Jessamy took her happiness in another way. She went about with an uplifted look on her lovely face; touched everything with a kind of reverence, brooding over the teacups and lifting the butter-jar as if they were little babies. She forgot nothing, left nothing undone, and when she went to call her mother and Phyllis to their first meal at home, though her voice would quaver, they were summoned to a perfect meal, thanks to her, and in spite of Bab's temporary craziness.

Nixie had a brilliant red bow, which he despised, on his collar for the occasion, and was fed in turn by every one till he could eat no more, and retired to the front of the radiator to meditate on the advantages of house-keeping.

Mrs. Wyndham took her place at the head of her table, and showed such an improved appetite that Jessamy and Bab made their dinner chiefly of rapture, watching her and Phyllis enjoy the juicy steak.

"Now I've one more contribution to this mansion," said Tom, laying aside the gingham apron he had insisted on donning to help wash the dishes, when everything was once more in order. "I wanted to show you it before dinner, but I feared we'd get nothing to eat. Your mother has it in the parlor; it's for Phyllis."

Phyllis, guessing, jumped from the rocking-chair where she had been installed in range of the kitchen door to watch the dish-washing, and ran, as if she had never been ill, into the parlor. There sat her aunt, and in her lap lay curled up, like a powder-puff, the tiniest, whitest kitten ever seen! Phyllis had it cuddled in her neck in a moment.

"Oh, Tom, it's lovely! Oh, if you only knew how I'd been wanting a kitten! How did you find such a white one?" she cried rapturously.

"I've had it engaged for ten days; we've been waiting for it to learn to eat; it's only a month old," said Tom, looking very happy in Phyllis's pleasure. "Its mother is a white lady of most favorable record and perfect manners. They say her kittens are models in every way. Hope this one will do you and her credit."

"It shall be called 'Truce,' because we're at peace, and it's all white," said Phyllis.

"Truce is n't peace. However, it's a nice name," said Tom. "I called it 'Antiseptic Cotton'; it looks just like the packages of cotton we use in the hospitals; but I don't mind if you change the name—it is not quite convenient to call."

"Horrid!" said Bab, decidedly. "Truce is pretty. I think you might let some one else see just the tip of its tail, Phyl; we like kittens, too."

"This adds the very last touch of homeiness to everything," said Phyllis, generously handing her treasure to Bab. "Bless you, Tom, for getting it."

## CHAPTER IX.

### HOME-KEEPING HEARTS.

THE Wyndhams had been "out of Egypt," as Phyllis called it, a month. Tom painted a highly decorative sign bearing the word "Canaan" in gold letters on a red ground, to be placed over the front door, because his friends were not only out of Egypt, but entered into the Land of Promise. Although it was not quite possible to hang the inscription in the front hall, Phyllis would not discard it, but placed it over the window in the dining-room; the flat was indeed the Land of Promise to them all, and each realized it in her own way.

Mrs. Wyndham was almost entirely well; her improvement had been rapid from the first, and she was far happier than she had been since the fatal day when Mr. Hurd had come to tell her of her loss—a day that was now nearly a year in the past.

Phyllis was completely recovered; she was too happy to be less than well. Her hair had grown out in soft rings of curls, as Ruth had prophesied it would, and she had never been half as pretty in her life as now, with present joy and hope for the future shining in her beau-

tiful eyes. For Phyllis was dreaming and working; when household duties were done she spent certain hours of each day over her desk, and it was hard for her not to share Jessamy and Barbara's conviction that her little stories were one day to see the light.

The new plan was working triumphantly; the girls were so afraid of the failure prophesied for them that they dared not spend what they could honestly afford to spend, and their first month's bills were under the estimate; yet they had everything they needed for comfort as well as health. There were bad days, when everything went crossways from dawn till sunset—such days as will come to all households, even the best regulated. But when they came the girls treated them politely, pretending not to notice that they were crooked, as Phyllis suggested doing, and so those days came less often to them than to people who dwelt on their deficiencies.

Jessamy and Bab were making beds one morning, as usual, and Phyllis was out in the kitchen, clearing away the breakfast. Truce was on her shoulder; it was growing fast, but did not seem to find that a reason for abandoning its favorite perch. It was the most loving of small catkins, with golden eyes and a preternaturally long tail, and wore a scarlet ribbon on its scarlet leather collar to set off its pink-lined ears and pink nose and the snowy coat its devoted mistress kept spotless with soap and water. Truce never objected to anything Phyllis chose to do; indeed, Truce had what Bab called "reversed hydrophobia," for water had such an irresistible fascination for it that anything containing water was in danger from the meddlesome little white paws, whether it was the biggest water-pitcher or the daintiest vase.

Phyllis was singing, as usual. The two girls in the room near by heard her chanting to a tune of her own:

"Stay, stay at home, my heart, and rest;  
Home-keeping hearts are happiest;  
For those that wander they know not where  
Are full of trouble and full of care;  
To stay at home is best."

Then she apparently tired of Longfellow, for there were a few moments of silence, alter-

nating with chatter to the kitten. Suddenly she began singing to a swinging, not particularly tuneful tune, like those sung by children in their games; this time it was a funny little song of her own:

"Home-y and happy, cheery and bright,  
New tins to left of me, new tins to right;  
A little white kitten to pet and to cuddle,  
And purr back my peace when I get in a muddle;  
A getting-well mother, two girls, and a cat—  
My joys are so many they're crowding the flat.

Look out, Truchi-ki, you 'll fall!" And Jessamy and Bab heard a saucepan-cover drop, and guessed Phyllis had put up her hand to steady Truce on her shoulder.

"Copyrighted, Phyl?" called Bab; but Phyllis, on her knees looking at her cake in the oven, did not hear, and Jessamy put her hand over her sister's lips. "Let her alone, Bab; listen; she may improvise again," she said. "Now she 's beginning to sweep, and that usually inspires her."

Phyllis's broom flew, and Jessamy and Bab waited developments. Evidently Truce had dismounted and was ready for the frolic that sweeping always meant, for they heard Phyllis laugh, and cry: "Look out, Chu-chi-ki! How do you expect me to sweep if you hold my broom? I 'll spank you, kitten; you 've never had one tiny, least spanking in all your life!" Phyllis always talked nonsense to Truce, whose name had developed through an Italian pronunciation of Truce, Truchi, Chuchi, and finally into the Japanese-sounding Chuchi-ki, which Phyllis said meant "Trucie ki-tten," but which Jessamy more correctly defined as meaning nonsensical affection. Luckily for them, however, all the Wyndhams loved nonsense. To prove it, Phyllis began to sing once more—a long jumble of nonsense in one rhyme:

"Trouble found me where I sat,  
But I did n't care for that,  
Only learned my lesson pat;  
Then I took a heavy bat,  
And I hit old Trouble—spat!  
And I gave him tit for tat;  
Last, I drowned him in a vat.  
Now I 've learned to make a hat,  
Wash a dish, and sweep a mat,  
And I think I 'm getting fat  
In this blessed little flat,

With my snowy Trucie-cat;  
I 'm so very happy that  
I don't know where I am at!"

This was too much for the audience; two peals of laughter rang out from the bedroom, echoed by Mrs. Wyndham from the hall.

"Going crazy, Phyl?" gasped Bab.

"I don't know; I don't see that it matters," returned Phyllis. "I 'm brushing up our own kitchen, and everything I 've sung is true; I 'd like to know what consequence a little more or less sanity is under these circumstances? Oh, dear peoplekins, do you think we shall ever get used to this niceness? You need n't laugh at my inspirations; they 're real hymns of praise in spirit, even if they sound crazy."

"I am the one to sing hymns of praise, dear little Phyllis," said Mrs. Wyndham, fondly. "No one was ever blessed with three happy, contented, true-hearted props in misfortune as I have been."

"I 'll tell you a secret, mama," said Jessamy, emerging from under Phyllis's desk, where she had been picking up scraps of torn paper. "I suspect it is n't misfortune; I have a deep-seated suspicion that it is good luck that has come to us, and that if we had stayed rich we should have missed getting into the heart of things, and the real fun of living."

"Now be honest, Jessamy," said Bab. "I have entire confidence in Phyllis and myself enjoying makeshifts, but I have a horrid doubt that you may be making the best of it. Don't you wish you could go about, and have all the pretty things you love, and do no housework, only be beautiful all day long?"

Jessamy paused, her color heightened; she was too honest to answer equivocally.

"Sometimes," she said slowly, "I remember that, though we are rather simple girls, and like to stay girlish as long as we can, still we are growing up, and I 'd like a bit more girlish fun, because we can't be young long. The pretty things I don't miss, because I have them—to make a bull. I mean our stock of pretty clothes is not used up; and our flat is simple, but it has the right look; thank fortune, beauty is not a matter of cost. I am very happy, and truly contented; your 'horrid doubt,' Bab, need n't come again. I think this year has



done more for us than we realize, and I am honestly satisfied. But I do hope we may be able to better ourselves; if only my illustrating turns out something, I ask nothing more of fate."

"Hear, hear! — there 's Ruth," Bab broke off suddenly, and ran to admit her friend.

Ruth had come to spend the day, and hem the ruffles of her new white dimity, for there were hints of spring in the air, and the willows near the northern entrance to Central Park had a filmy, yellow-green effect in the distance, as if the coming leaves were foreshadowed in a mist of sap.

The girls gathered in Phyllis's room, where the sewing-machine stood, with its top invitingly laid back ready for the "bee." The Wyndhams were to sew on spring garments, too, and they all had prepared for a pleasant day.

"If we had nothing to do but practise a little music, get through a little shopping, make and receive a few calls, we should miss this sort of pleasantness," said Jessamy, touching up a bow on the hat she was trimming, and holding it off to look at it in the glass in true artistic manner.

"Half the best things in life are not to be met on the highways; it 's the byways which are loveliest, figuratively and literally," said Ruth, contentedly.

"That sounds like a poem condensed into prose," remarked Bab. "Are you going to drop into poetry?"

Ruth laughed. "All happy people are more or less poetical, I fancy," she said. "I wonder if Silas Wegg meant more than he knew when he talked about dropping into poetry in the light of a friend? If you 're friendly toward life and people, then you get happy, then poetical; it 's a clear sequence in my mind, only I have n't expressed it clearly."

"Not very, Ruthlet, and that 's undeniable," laughed Phyllis. "I 'm certain Mr. Wegg meant nothing so complex, even if he had a wooden leg. However, your idea is all right; I know from experience one becomes a poet under pressure of happiness."

"One does; the rest don't," said Jessamy. "Phyllis sings yards of rhymes when she 's

salubrious, but Bab and I remain prose copies. Oh, dear, there 's the bell, just when we are so cozy!"

"Here is Mrs. Van Alyn, girls; she 's coming in there," called Bab from the hall.

"I have come to be disagreeable and spoil all your plans," said Mrs. Van Alyn, kissing Phyllis and Jessamy. "Don't get up, dears; the end of the bed is all I want, for I mean to hurry off, and take Jessamy with me." And she pushed one side the breadths of an organ-die Jessamy was cutting.

"Oh, don't sit on Truciel!" cried Bab. "The kitten 's somewhere there, asleep, after bothering our lives out."

"Dear me!" cried Mrs. Van Alyn, jumping up hastily. "Why, Barbara, you scamp, why did you startle me so? The kitten is rolled up in the pillow-sham. Where is your mother?"

"Mama went out to market, and to sit in the park awhile; she has n't come in," said Bab.

"Then I can speak in ordinary tones; the worst of these dear little apartments is that the rooms are too close together to allow secrets," laughed Mrs. Van Alyn. "I would rather your mother should not know of my errand, lest it lead to hopes that would come to nothing. There is a young lawyer of my acquaintance — the son of very nice people I met in the Berkshires — who had a desk in Mr. Abbott's office over a year ago; he thinks he may be able to help Mr. Hurd prove that Abbott made over his property too late to have done so legally, in which case the law would recover part of your loss. I want to carry Jessamy off to lunch, and Mr. Lane, the young lawyer, will call to see her. It will save your mother possible disappointment, and you know enough of the matter to satisfy him, don't you, Jessamy?"

"I know more than when it happened, for then I knew nothing," said Jessamy, rising at once to get ready to go out; "I have tried to learn all about it since. Of course I will go. Dear Mrs. Van Alyn, you are always so good to us!"

"Nonsense, my dear! There is not much goodness in stealing one of you for a few hours; you are such busy bees nowadays I can hardly get a peep at you. Make haste, or such haste



as can be made consistently with looking your prettiest. Old Peter is driving up and down, and I 'm dreadfully afraid of him; he looks unutterable things if I have the horses out longer than he approves. I wish you girls could keep me here all day, instead of the exigencies of the law driving Jessamy and me away. There are never bright spots like this in my house." And Mrs. Van Alyn's sweet face clouded; her three little girls, who would have been the age of the Wyndhams, had been in their graves for more than ten long years.

"Ready, Jessamy sweet?" she asked, as Jessamy returned, looking lovely in her gray gown, with the blush roses nestling against her hair under the soft brim of her hat. "Good-by, Phyllida, Babette, and little Ruth, who manages to glean so much worth having. Tell your mother only that I carried Jessamy off to lunch, and will return her safely."

"Would n't it be nice if we could get some of our money back?" asked Bab, thoughtfully tickling Truce's nose with the end of his long tail, when she had come back from seeing Mrs. Van Alyn and Jessamy off.

"Nice! It would be glorious," cried Phyllis,— "though that does n't sound quite consistent with all we 've been saying."

#### CHAPTER X.

##### THE LITTLE BLIND GOD OPENS HIS EYES.

THERE was grief in the Wyndham apartment for Tom—Tom, who was as dear to them as one of themselves, and who had brightened their days of trial, as he had shared their recent pleasure. Tom and Nixie visited it no more. It was all the fault of Bab, and her mother and the girls were powerless to straighten out the dreadful tangle.

Tom had been gradually showing pretty plainly that, though all the Wyndhams were dear to him, the dearest was the small person who had fallen across his path, quite literally, nearly a year before—that for little Babbie he cherished a feeling different from the brotherly love he gave Jessamy and Phyllis.

Bab herself knew this perfectly well, and it turned her into a pocket-edition of Beatrice;

she flouted poor Tom with more cruelty than "the dear Lady Disdain" bestowed on Benedick. For a time Tom bore her sarcasms and snubbing with pained surprise and patience; but that day was past. He had decided, apparently, that if Bab did not want him he would not inflict his presence upon her, and thus it was that "Canaan" was dreary for the lack of his cheery laugh, and to all the Wyndhams the loss was hard to bear. To all; for, though Bab betrayed her feeling on the subject by no word or sign, she grew thinner, and learned the habit of silence, which transformed her into a being unrecognizable to those who knew her best.

"She 's Barbie, mama, not Babbie," said Jessamy, tears of impatience and regret in her eyes. "She has put a barbed-wire fence all around herself, and she 's not only keeping out our happiness, but the worst of it is, I 'm sure she 's driving off her own happiness, too! And I feel so sorry for Tom that I can hardly keep from saying: 'Oh, Tom dear, just please be fond of me, and let that naughty girl go!'"

"That would be a singular performance on the part of my dignified elder daughter," her mother said, smiling. "I am quite as sorry as you are, my dear, and anxious; but I am trying to let matters take their course, and I think they may straighten themselves."

"They are n't taking their course," sighed Jessamy. "Bab is warping them all out of line. The dreadful part of it is that Babbie is evidently behaving so badly to Tom because she wants to treat him so particularly well. I wish I could straighten her out!"

"Don't try; wait," advised her mother. "Bab is very young. I believe I dread to see one of my girls with a lover, though it be such a dear boy as Tom."

While the Wyndhams had lost one friend, they had gained another—not one to fill the place Tom's absence left vacant, but one they enjoyed greatly. On the top floor of the house where the "Land of Canaan" apartment made the third lived a family whose youngest member, a girl of eleven, frequently held what Bab called "overflow meetings" with her dolls on the steps, for the family was large—as was the doll family, for that matter—and little Margery

was forced, by lack of space, to the street, the playground of city children.

A friendship had sprung up between her and the Wyndhams, especially Bab, born of mutual admiration for Janean habits with spasmodic

A rainy day came, and Margery, left alone with the servant, recognized her opportunity. Bab, alone too, as it chanced, was startled by a violent peal of the bell. Answering the summons, she faced the Hortons' maid, white under



"'I FEEL THAT IF I WAS ANOTHER ME YOU WOULD BE KIND TO YOU,' SAID THE MOTHER" (SEE PAGE 100.)

joints, and a little girl's unspenkable worship for an older one. Margery was a timid child, given to the companionship of books and people beyond her age, and with the contrasting childishness and maturity of an only child in a family of adults.

Tom was included in her favor, both for his own and for Nixie's sake; once when Margery had a sore throat Tom cared her, and henceforth was brevetted "my doctor," a distinction he valued. As weeks went by Margery's sharp eyes noticed the estrangement and increasing coolness between "her doctor" and her dearest Bab, and finally that Tom came to the house no more. After long puzzling over it, Margery set her nimble wits to work to remedy the wrong she could not understand. Simple methods did not appeal to the sweet little girl; at last, however, she hit upon a plan that suited her childish love of the theatrical and an unconfessed longing to be a heroine.

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her freckles, who stood on the dorm-mat, wringing her hands, and crying at the sight of her: "Oh, Miss Wyndham, please do come up, for the love of Heaven! I do lie alone with Margery, and she's took that bad she'll be dead ere her mother comes back!"

"Dead! Margery!" gasped Bab, and flew up the stairs, in her alarm outstripping Nora.

There was cause for alarm, to the eyes of inexperienced Bab, as she looked at the little figure stretched out on the bed, her face swollen out of all likeness to pretty Margery, or even to human features. A crimson lace, cheeks, eyelids, lips puffed and distorted, lay on the pillow; crimson hands as stately as tomatoes picked the quilt; while hollow groans issued from the quivering mouth.

"Oh, Margery!" cried Bab, in an agony of terror, "what has happened? Run, run, Nora, for Dr. Gilbert; I'll stay with her. It must be poison. Oh, what has she eaten?"

"Nothin', miss, but her lunch wid the rest of 'em," began Norah, while Margery moaned: "Not Dr. Gilbert; I want my own Dr. Tom."

"Oh, Margery dear, Dr. Gilbert is so much older and wiser," Bab pleaded.

But Margery only burst into plaintive sobs. "I want my own doctor; I should n't think you 'd be cruel to him now," she sighed.

"Then call Dr. Leighton, Norah," said Bab, blushing at this betrayal of Margery's observation. "Only hurry, hurry!"

It seemed hours before Tom came, though Norah met him in the street and returned within fifteen minutes. Bab spent the minutes bathing the still swelling face, soothing the poor little patient, and trying to control her own nerves. Margery grew more ill every moment; would Tom never come?

At last he came, and as he entered the room the relief was so great that Bab forgot to incase herself in the disguise she had worn so long. Her eyes were so full of love and joy as she raised them to Tom that he stopped short in amazement at the revelation, and a great flood of happiness rushed over him, too great for any circumstances to check.

"Oh, Tom, I 'm so glad you 've come! Now it will be all right," said Barbara, in a low voice of absolute trust. "Margery is dreadfully ill, but I am sure you will save her."

Tom did not answer; he walked straight to the bed, without looking at Barbara. His heart throbbed so joyfully that he had hard work to force his thoughts to duty.

"Margery, what have you eaten?" he demanded, having felt the child's pulse and looked closely under the almost closed eyelids.

"Nothing," murmured Margery.

"Margery, remember I am a doctor and know when I am told the truth; you must tell me what you have taken," said Tom, sternly.

Bab crept close to Tom, oblivious to all other considerations on hearing this hint confirming her fear of poison. Tom put one hand over the two little hands clasped imploringly on his shoulder, trying to remember only Margery and to forget that this was Bab coming to him thus voluntarily.

"I always tell the truth," said Margery, with

all the dignity her strength allowed. "I have n't eaten anything, but I did n't say I had n't *taken* anything. I took quinine, but it 's much worse than the other time; I would n't tell you if I was n't dying."

"Quinine! Ah, that 's it! And worse than the other time? Has quinine made you ill in this way before?" asked Tom, comfortingly patting Bab's head, which had drooped on his shoulder at the word "dying."

"Once, but not so bad. I did n't think it would be so awful when I took it, though I did think I 'd feel dreadfully. The doctor said I had an idiotsinkersy in me about taking quinine," groaned Margery.

"Did you take it purposely?" asked Tom, amazed, as he handed Norah a prescription and bade her hasten to get it filled. "That was certainly an idiot-syncrasy! Why have you done such a thing? Do you like to be ill, Margery?"

"No; but — oh, my mama won't like to find me dead!" And Margery burst into open wailing, in which Bab joined.

"You are not going to die," said Tom. "Bab dear, don't cry so; Margery will come out all right. But why, in the name of all that is wonderful, have you taken what you knew would make you ill, little lassie?"

"For your sake," said suffering Margery, as impressively as her swollen features permitted.

"For my sake!" echoed Tom, dumfounded.

"I knew that if I was awfully ill Miss Bab would be nice to you," murmured Margery.

"You dreadful child!" cried Bab, indignantly, springing away from Tom's side.

Margery turned away, hiding her swollen face, tears, and wounded heart silently in her pillow.

"She does n't mean that, Margery," said Tom, gently. "You are hurting her, Bab; you know she adores you. Be just to the poor mite, and remember her motives were good, even if her methods are doubtful," he whispered hastily.

Bab knelt contritely by the bed, and took the queer, forlorn little figure in her arms. "No, of course I did n't mean that," she said. "Forgive me, Margery. What made you think of such a very strange thing to do?"

"The Bible says you ought to lay down your

life for your friends, does n't it?" sobbed Margery, drying her eyes on the ruffle on her night-gown-sleeve, in default of a handkerchief.

"It says you can't prove greater love than by dying for them—yes," said Bab.

"Well, then, I thought I ought to be willing just to be sick for you, when all the books say how every one forgives every one else and foes make up around sick-beds and things. I could n't bear to see you and my doctor getting worse foes all the time, so I took the quinine, though I knew I had an idiotsinkersy in me that made it poison me, and I'd be dreadfully sick. I thought you'd make up around my bed, and love me, and say how I'd saved you, and how you'd never forget me. And now you are friends around my bed, and I'm fearfully sick, but you only call me dreadful! Oh, why don't my mama come and take care of me?" And Margery wailed anew over the ingratitude of humankind.

What could Bab do less than express—though Tom was there—her gratitude to this martyr to her welfare?

"Dear little Margery, you're not dreadful; I am dreadful to have called you so, even though I did n't mean it. You are a dear, devoted little friend. Please forgive me, for you know I love you dearly," she said, kissing the sad, shapeless little face.

"And my doctor?" stipulated Margery, before according pardon.

"I think we shall be better friends; I won't be horrid to him any more," whispered Barbara. And then Margery gave the kiss of peace.

Mrs. Horton returned at this opportune moment, and Tom escorted Bab downstairs, leaving Margery, already better, to her mother's care.

Barbara let herself into the apartment with her key, and for a few moments an awkward silence prevailed, broken at last by Tom.

"I think I shall adopt a Margery rampant, with a quinine capsule in the quartering, for my coat of arms," he said. "Our queer little friend with the constitutional idiosyncrasy against that drug has done me a great service. She has proved that you don't hate me after all, do you, Babbie?"

Bab was silent.

"Barbara Wyndham, don't waste any more

time. You have treated me badly enough, Heaven knows, and I have n't enjoyed it. Tell me this instant that you love me," said Tom, in a tone which Bab might have resented had not her recent fright and humiliation subdued her.

"I love you, Tom," she repeated meekly, and straightway forgot all doubt, all fear, in perfect happiness.

When Jessamy came home, before her mother and Phyllis, she nearly dropped in the doorway, for there was Bab throned in the window, looking radiantly pretty with the joy and womanly tenderness which the events of the afternoon had called forth shining in her face. And beside her, on a low stool, sat Tom, looking entirely blissful and unusually humble. He sprang up at the sight of Jessamy. "Come to your brother, Jessamy!" he cried. "Bab has promised to marry me."

"Indeed, I have promised *not* to marry him," said Bab. "I have told him I will not so much as hear it mentioned for ages. As though I wanted to marry yet!"

But Jessamy waited to hear no more. She threw herself at Bab in some mysterious way, and hugged and kissed her sister, with a kiss for Tom too, in almost hysterical rapture.

"It was pretty rough on me to be treated as I have been lately," said Tom, as they tried to settle down to sanity. "But I ought to have known what it meant, for the very first time I ever saw Bab she threw herself at my feet, for me to take or leave, as I chose."

"Why, Thomas Leighton!" cried Bab, indignantly.

"Fact, and you know it," affirmed Tom. "Never mind, Babbie; 'some falls are means the happier to rise,' you know. That fall of yours on the Blackboard steps was one of them, for, my heart, are n't we happy?"

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE LADY OF THE SCALES.

THERE was mystery in the air of the little apartment from the day on which Mrs. Van Alyn had carried Jessamy away to meet the young lawyer, Robert Lane—mystery from which Mrs. Wyndham felt herself excluded. Evidently the girls were in a conspiracy of some

sort, but their mother did not give the matter much thought, knowing that when they were ready they would confide in her, and feeling quite certain she was excluded from their secrets for her own sake.

Robert Lane, whose possible connection with her late was unknown to Mrs. Wyndham, became a frequent visitor; sometimes it seemed to her he, too, was concerned in the conspiracy

bad, but they all were as blithe as birds, and Jessamy and Phyllis were as happy over their good fortune as Bab was in her engagement. For Phyllis had written three stories, which Jessamy had illustrated, and two out of the three had been accepted by a reputable magazine, and the editor had asked for more work from both the young aspirants. It seemed to the girls that fortune, love, and happiness lay at the points of their pen and pencil.

"It is such a nice, quiet time now, mummy, with no special work on hand, let's ask Aunt Henrietta to spend the day," said Jessamy, one morning.

Bab groaned, and even Phyllis looked downcast. "Oh, dear, it's awful to have a sense of duty," sighed Bab. "What does make you so dreadfully conscientious, Jessamy?"

"It is not such a tremendous proof of conscientiousness—" Jessamy began; but her mother interrupted her:

"It is precisely what I have been meaning to suggest. We have scarcely seen our aunt lately; and we owe her attention; she is growing old."

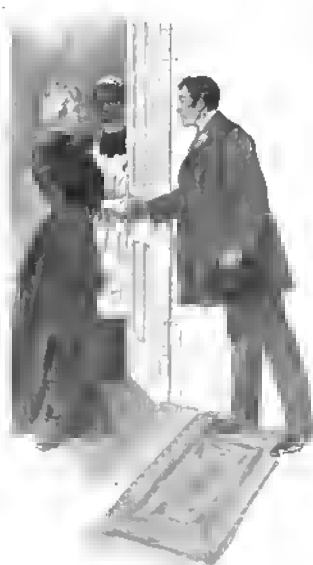
"She is not growing old, mummy; you know that: she was always old, but she does not mean to admit it, nor let it increase," said Bab. "Well, I suppose I am to maintain my portion of family virtue. Write your note, Jessamy-Griselda, the patient and heroic!"

Aunt Henrietta accepted the invitation, which was for three days later, and appeared, in all the dignity of a stiff black silk, at half-past twelve, because she disapproved of the custom of arriving ten minutes before luncheon; half an hour was not too long, she declared, to rest after reaching one's destination before sitting down to the table.

"You're been getting a new rug for your dining-room," said Aunt Henrietta, in the tone of disapproval which she kept "for family use," as Bab said.

"Yes; that is Phyllis's contribution to our comfort: she bought it with the check from one of her stories," replied Mrs. Wyndham, mildly.

"So Bimbam is the only throne?" said Aunt Henrietta. "No, no potatoes; you must know that my dear little Bimbam. It is often the one who says most who does least."



A BRABER OR GOOD STORIES

with her girls, but she dismissed the thought as unlikely, since he was such a new acquaintance. Whatever was in the wind, it could be nothing

"Barbara is far from a drone, aunt," said Phyllis, seeing Bab fold her lips with a look at once angry and hurt. "There must be one to help with the housekeeping, and she has all the care of providing. Bab is the most competent little person, and is so cheerful she keeps us all up to the mark."

"Humph!" ejaculated Aunt Henrietta, with a world of significance in the sound. "Take away that dreadful cat; I always detested cats! How people can want animals in such limited space I can't conceive. When are you to be married, Barbara?—or will that young man you are engaged to ever be able to support you?"

"Next fall, if Dr. Leighton has his wish," said Bab, while Phyllis gathered up Truce and bore him, surprised and indignant, from the room, where, as everywhere, he was used to being considered an acquisition. "Dr. Leighton would not have asked me to marry him if he could not support me." Barbara disdained reminding her aunt that Tom was heir to a good inheritance; it would have been unbearable if even Aunt Henrietta, for whose opinion in general she had little regard, looked on her marriage from a mercenary point of view.

"Very probably; he seems to be a very nice young man," said Aunt Henrietta, to Bab's surprise, for she had prepared to do battle for her lover.

The luncheon passed off with no further passage of arms, and Aunt Henrietta settled herself comfortably to slow knitting in the best chair in the parlor, and to conversation with Mrs. Wyndham. The girls were unmistakably "fidgety," as Aunt Henrietta protestingly remarked. A note had come for Jessamy during lunch; she had read it with quickened breath, and conveyed it to the other two slyly. The effect on them all had been disturbing. Bab slipped out for a few moments, and Mrs. Wyndham thought she caught a whisper from her to Phyllis containing the words "telephone," "Tom," and "Ruth." When Bab returned she flitted from room to room as if she could not keep still, and though Phyllis had greater control of her nerves, her answers to remarks were so wide of the mark that Aunt Henrietta commented on it, and her Aunt Wyndham kindly let her alone.

As to Jessamy, her cheeks were burning, her eyes so bright that Aunt Henrietta, scanning her attentively, prescribed: "Six drops of No. 3 aconite, in a half-glass of water, and take one teaspoonful every hour. You are certainly feverish, child," she added. Jessamy's great beauty had made her Aunt Henrietta's favorite from childhood.

At half-past four, just as Aunt Henrietta was rolling up her work preparatory to taking tea before setting out homeward,—“You live at such an unearthly distance from civilization,” she said, as reproachfully as though the Wyndhams were selfishly pursuing their own pleasure in going uptown for low rent,—just at half-past four the bell rang, and Mrs. Wyndham met at the door Robert Lane, looking so excited, entering with such a quick step and flashing eyes, that he brought an electric atmosphere with him.

"What has happened to you, Mr. Lane?" asked Mrs. Wyndham, rising to welcome him. "You know my aunt, Mrs. Hewlett? You look as though some one had made you heir to a fortune."

"Not a bad guess, Mrs. Wyndham," said Robert, taking the extended hand. "I have as good news as that to tell you; I honestly believe I like it better than a fortune for myself."

"Then it is all right? He has come to terms?" cried Bab, while Jessamy and Phyllis, knowing the answer before it was given, dropped, quite pale, on the sofa, their arms holding each other tight.

"All right, little lady; the check is here," cried Robert, jubilantly slapping himself on the breast.

Mrs. Wyndham turned pale; even Aunt Henrietta began to tremble.

"May we know what you are talking about, young man?" she said sternly. "Evidently the girls are in your counsels."

"My dear Mrs. Wyndham," Robert began, "it is rather a long story; the beginning dates from the winter before last, when I was first graduated from the law school, and had a desk in Mr. Abbott's outer office."

At the mention of that fateful name, Mrs. Wyndham sat erect, clasping tight the arms of her chair. "Mr. Abbott!" she whispered.

"Precisely; the Abbott who robbed you," said Robert, nodding emphatically. "At the time I was frequently asked to witness his signature to papers; among others there were three transfer deeds. The dates of those deeds I remember, owing to circumstances, and I saw enough of their contents to know they transferred a portion of Abbott's property to his wife. The first was signed on my own birthday, December 7; the second on January 3, the birthday of a chum of mine, on which we always dine together; the third on the eve of Washington's birthday, and I witnessed it with my coat on, ready to start out of town for the holiday—so I was prepared to swear to all three dates with absolute certainty. There were many things then which led me to suspect Mr. Abbott did not quite come up to one's idea of an honest man, and the following spring I heard of the failure of the Wyndham Iron Works, and that you had lost everything, while Abbott still prospered. Then I thought hard, and as a result of cogitating I went to Mr. Hurd and told him about those papers I had witnessed, and how that rascal had put property out of his hands when the company was already involved. Mr. Hurd jumped at the information. 'Young man,' he said, 'you maybe the very witness we need to establish what we all knew, but could not prove.' Then Mrs. Van Alyn let me meet Miss Jessamy, and she gave me information we lacked. Mr. Hurd did not have to disturb you, having your power of attorney, and they thought it better not to tell you about it until they were sure of success. Well, there were undoubtedly other transfers made besides those I witnessed, but those were all we could prove; still, they amounted to forty thousand dollars. We convinced Abbott we could prove that much rascality, and that if he did n't disgorge he would be sued, and made to give up not only that, but costs and reputation—what he has of it! The old scamp hated the alternative, but he's too sharp not to know it was the cheapest thing he could do, so he gave Mr. Hurd his check for forty thousand,—it's certified,—and as a reward for the little assistance I've been, Mr. Hurd let me bring it up to you.

"Mrs. Wyndham, here is a check for forty

thousand dollars, and if you are as glad about it as I am, you are a happy woman."

So saying, and with a decided choke in his voice, Robert laid the certified check on Mrs. Wyndham's knee, and dropped quietly back in his chair.

Not a sound broke the stillness with which all present had listened to the long story. Then Aunt Henrietta electrified the company. Without a word, she arose to her full stately height, walked deliberately over to where Robert sat, put both arms around him, and kissed him soundly, with a kiss that resounded. "You are a second Daniel Webster," she said, and solemnly resumed her seat.

Nothing better could have happened; Aunt Henrietta had relieved the tension of a moment that was in danger of becoming overstrained. Following her aunt's example, though with a difference, Mrs. Wyndham took both of Robert's hands, tears of joy running down her cheeks. "I can't thank you, my dear," she said simply. "I know you are as glad as we are. But I shall never, never forget that we owe it to you that this portion of our property is restored. And to us, having been taught the lesson of economy so sharply, forty thousand dollars will be a far larger sum than it once would have seemed."

Jessamy, Phyllis, and Bab were crying, but their faces were flushed with joy, and they were smiling as they wept. "Oh, there's Tom!" cried Bab, running to the door to let him in, as she always did on hearing his peculiar signal.

"Hallo, Bob, old man; I see you've got it. Bab telephoned me," cried Tom, the instant he saw the April faces. "Talk about special providences, was n't it about the neatest bit of good fortune that you should have witnessed those deeds? I tell you, Mother Wyndham, I'm tremendously glad! Now it's over, and you know the whole story, I don't mind acknowledging that my engagement to Bab depended on the recovery of that money; if it had n't been captured I should have broken it off—I would n't have married a girl without a little fortune."

"She has n't married you yet, sir, that girl-with-a-fortune, so you'd better not be too sure of her. I may take my share of the forty thousand and purchase a little Frenchman with

a little French title," said Bab, saucily — so saucily that Aunt Henrietta said severely:

"Barbara, such jests are not seemly."

Once more the bell rang, and Ruth dashed in like a whirlwind, and seized the entire family in her arms at once, apparently, so swift were her motions. "Oh, dear, dear girls, I *am* so glad!" she cried. "When you telephoned, Bab, I was out; but the moment I came in I turned right around and started over here. I could n't be more gladder if it were my own money."

"Nor more mixed up in your comparatives," laughed Bab, returning Ruth's hug with vehemence. "I knew you'd be glad; you're that kind. You sympathized with our trouble, but it counts for even more to be glad of our joy. You are a trump, Miss Wells, and I call our lawyer, Mr. Lane, to witness I said so."

"Are you going to move, or do anything different now?" asked Ruth.

"Not we," said Jessamy. "This was our Land of Canaan, and we will not desert the dear little place because our income is doubled."

"We never could love any other little place so well," said Phyllis. "It is so much our very own home. I'm not sure, even, that I regret our dear old home now. It will be very nice to feel that our shoes no longer pinch; that will satisfy me."

"And still nicer, literally, to be able to get shoes that don't pinch whenever ours are shabby. My idea of happiness is not wealth, but just enough to feel luxurious in having necessities plentifully. I shall buy half a dozen gloves and three pairs of shoes the moment madrina cashes that check," said Bab, whose harmless vanity was her pretty hands and feet.

"I don't think I can get beyond rejoicing to know that each of the girls now can have a little fortune when I am no longer with them," said Mrs. Wyndham.

She looked dangerously near tears, and Tom had an inspiration.

"Put that check on the floor, right in the middle," he cried. "Now, hands all round. Come on, Mrs. Hewlett." And the bad boy forcibly pulled Aunt Henrietta from her dignified seat. "'Ain't I glad I'm out of the wilderness, out of the wilderness, out of the wilderness,'" he sang; and the girls and Robert joined in breathlessly, laughing and dancing joyfully as they sang.

Round and round the check reposing on the floor they danced, Nixie and Trucie, who were the best of friends, capering outside the circle, and regarding the whole thing as done for their personal entertainment.

In a few moments Mrs. Wyndham gasped out appeals for mercy, and the Indian dance of triumph ended.

"Now we can settle down to peaceful happiness," said Jessamy, fanning herself.

"A little fortune, and our stories and pictures to make it bigger, dear Princess — why, we are going to be wealthy!" said Phyllis, throwing her arms around Jessamy in an aftermath of delight.

Bab encircled them both impartially, standing on tiptoe to do it.

"The troubles of the Wyndham girls are over," she said. "They are the happiest three in the world, because 'Home-keeping hearts *are* happiest,' you know, and

"East or West, Home is Best!"

